# FREE! WOLVERINE #1

## EXCLUSIVE 22-PAGE COMIC INSIDE!

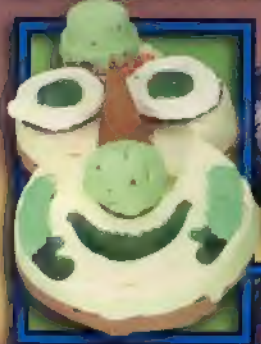
# WIZARD

# TURNER X2!

Turner's characters: (from top) Grace, Jehku and Grell

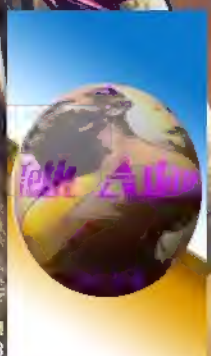
MICHAEL TURNER

## VOTE FOR MIKE'S NEXT PROJECT WITH OUR 2 EXCLUSIVE PREVIEWS!



## WHAT THE...?

WHY'S THIS HERE? SEE PAGE 164!



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THE COMICS MAGAZINE • NUMBER 139 • APRIL 2003

I'M SO TIRED OF PEOPLE TAKING ONE LOOK IN MY DIRECTION AND PASSING JUDGEMENT...THEY NEVER SEE ME FOR WHAT I REALLY AM: THAT LITTLE YELLOW SKULL GLUED TO MYSTIQUE'S FOREHEAD.

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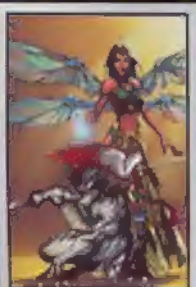

The **Ekos/Dragonfly** cover (**left**) was done by Mike Turner and Peter Steigerwald. To check out both new series, and to get the scoop on how to vote for which one you wanna see first, go to page 44. The **X-Men** movie cover (**center**) is courtesy of 20th Century Fox. For a look at an exclusive set diary from co-star Shawn Ashmore (Iceman), skate over to page 58. The **Venom** cover (**right**) was rendered by "Draw a Wizard Cover" contest winner, Michael Wilson. For a look at Marvel's Tsunami books, including *Venom*, slither over to page 66.

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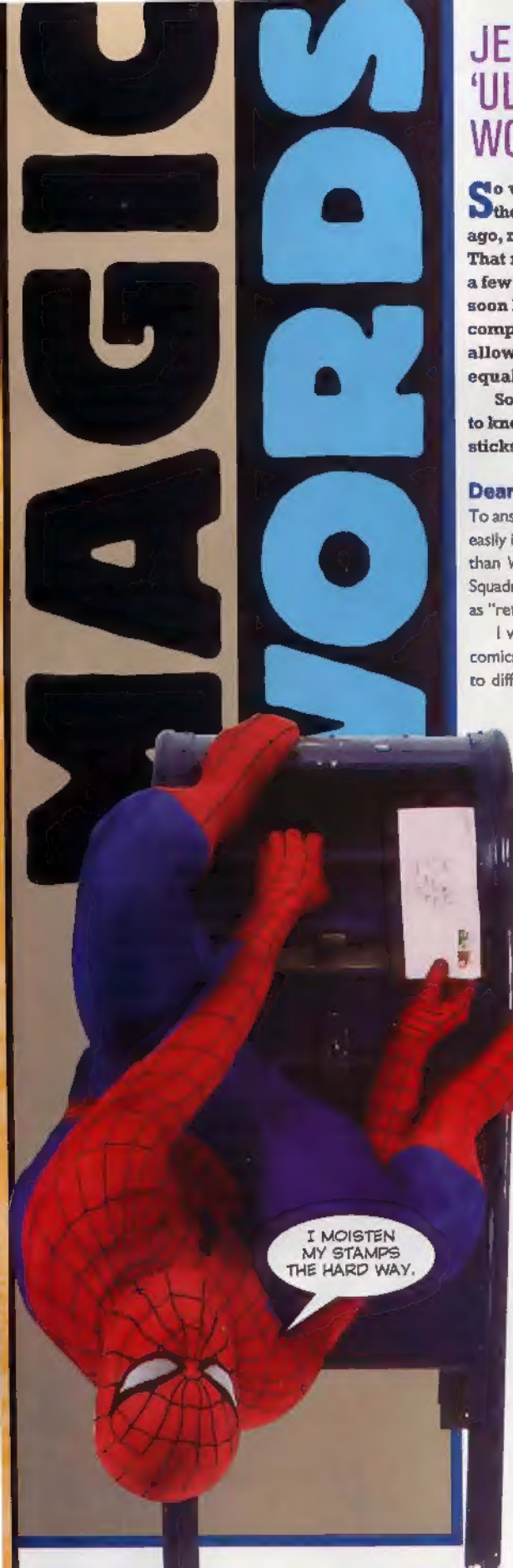
## EXCLUSIVE OFFER

COOL STUFF THROUGH THE MAIL

### SUPER HERO SCOOTER

When he's not running the backstage action on "The Muppet Show," stage manager Scooter protects the innocent as a swashbuckling superhero! The latest in a line of exclusive Muppets figures from Palisades Toys, Super Hero Scooter is available only through Wizard Entertainment. For details on how to get your mitts on this ultra-hot figure, zip over to page 32.




# JENNIFER LOVE HEWITT... 'ULTIMATE' WHINERS... WONDER WOMAN'S 'PROTECTION'

**So what am I still doing here, you ask? It's like this: Even though I moved to, uh, "greener pastures" at Top Cow a month ago, magazine publishing often takes place months in advance. That means the "Magic Words" pipeline is still primed with a few issues of old-fashioned Jim McLauchlin goodness. You'll soon have a new merry maven of "Magic Words" to keep you company. But in the meantime, my good buddies at *Wizard* are allowing me to keep the seat warm while a suitable (Read: equally smart-assed) replacement is found.**

**So the good news is: more of the same ol' crap you've come to know and love for the time being. Now get out your whuppin' sticks. Time to beat up Bill Jemas again.**

## Dear Magic Words,

To answer Bill Jemas' question on the current post-2000 "age" of comics, it's easily identified as the Retro Age. For proof, you don't have to look further than *Wizard*'s 2003 preview in issue #137. Revivals of the Teen Titans, Squadron Supreme and World's Finest (Batman/Superman) are there, as well as "retro" takes such as *Hulk: Gray*.

I would like to challenge Bill as well in regard to the current "age" of comics. Once, Marvel WAS the "House of Ideas," with titles that appealed to different interests. If Marvel is "leading the charge," then I would ask Marvel/Bill to come up with a solo male superhero ongoing series, a solo female ongoing superhero series and a group ongoing series with characters not based on characters previously seen in a Marvel comic. This is, after all, the new millennium. Let's make it the new age of comic books, as well.

**Patrick D. Wait**
**emeralddr@hotmail.com**

**Okay. Jemas says Marvel has "a dozen new titles coming out this spring, many of which fit the categories you mention." Under solo male, there's a new *Namor* series written by some guy named Bill Jemas with art by Andi Watson (*Breakfast After Noon*). Under "new group," look for *Runaways*, an all-new series written by Brian K. Vaughan (*Y: The Last Man*). Howzat for service with a smile?**

## Dear Jim,

A month or so back, I sent in a letter asking about an updated version of *The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe*. I walk into my comic shop the other day, and there is a copy of the *Marvel Encyclopedia*.

I also saw Marvel's *Origin* paperback—curious again, as I had sent in a previous missive about the possibility of Marvel releasing the *Origin* series as a paperback. All of this makes me wonder if:

A) You have some kind of psychic power to make loyal Wizard readers' wishes come true? (If so, I've got a long wish list, and it starts with Jennifer Love Hewitt.)

B) You are secretly using your inside connections to make loyal *Wizard* readers' wishes come true? (Again, I've got a long wish list, and it starts with Jennifer Love Hewitt.)

C) You and the *Wizard* Bunny threaten Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada with a game of "Hide the Monkey" if he doesn't pony up with the aforementioned loyal *Wizard* readers' wishes? (In which case, forget the rest of the list, I'll just take Jennifer Love Hewitt.)

Which, if any of these, is it?

**Travis Sweeten**
**garrison25@aol.com**

# BUNNY AWARD

**Jim,**

About four years ago, I worked in a comic shop. One of my favorite things about the job (aside from getting paid to read comics) was seeing which titles people bought on a monthly basis. But nowadays, I have no idea.

So I say everyone should send in lists of the top 10 comics they buy. I volunteered the idea, so I also volunteer my list. I think I've got some solid titles:

10) *JSA*
9) *JLA*
8) *Batman*
7) *New X-Men*
6) *Daredevil*
5) *Ultimate X-Men*
4) *Amazing Spider-Man*
3) *X-Statix*
2) *The Ultimates*
1) *Powers*

Now it's time for everyone else to step up, and that includes you, Jim. And get some creators in on it, too. Inquiring minds want to know.

**Hayden Davis**
**brak116@juno.com**

**In descending, 10-to-1 order, my fave-raves would be: *Scion*, *American Century*, *Noble Causes*, *Powers*, *X-Statix*, *Amazing Spider-Man*, *The Ultimates*, *Strangers in Paradise*, *Ultimate Spider-Man* and *Savage Dragon* (which comes with my highest possible recommendation.)**

**And since you went double-time on books by Brian Michael Bendis and Mark Millar, let's have them chime in.**

**Millar chooses (in 10-to-1 order): *Amazing Spider-Man*, *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, *The Filth*, *Rawhide Kid*, *Punisher*, *Ultimate Spider-Man*, *Fantastic Four*, *Global Frequency*, *Incredible Hulk* and *Planetary*. "And *The Ultimates* and *Ultimate X-Men* would have topped my list, of course, had this been a secret ballot," he says.**

**Bendis says, "I wholeheartedly vote for the truly incredible *Incredible Hulk*, *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, *Hellboy*, *American Century*, *The Filth*, *Ultimates*, *Global Frequency*, *JLA/JSA* graphic novel, *Queen and Country* and *Hopeless Savages*."**

**So, like, any others?**

**No, no, no, no, no. It's *gerbils* we hide with Quesada; not monkeys.**

**The outrageous fortune of the sudden appearance of a *Marvel Encyclopedia* and *Origin* paperback in accordance with your wishes is just that—outrageous fortune.**

**Although I *could* make your wishes come true through my amazing powers. I just choose not to, as you strike me as a boring and bland individual. Now if you did something cool and exhibited some actual ability such as...oh, I dunno, designing a tombstone or something, then we could talk.**

**Dear Jim,**

Recently, I went to the official "Lady Death" movie Website (**www.LadyDeathTheMovie.com**) and was overjoyed to discover that my entry had won the "Design Your Own Tombstone" contest.

However, when I reviewed the contest and submission rules, I was disappointed to find that a date with a Lady D. lookalike wasn't part of the grand prize! Given your renowned influence throughout the industry, is there any way you could rectify this oversight?

**Greg Beilke**
**beilkgn@dept56.com**

**Sure. We'll just paint Jennifer Love Hewitt all pasty-white and send her on over.**

**Hey, Ho and Hello, Jim,**

After reading *Wizard* #137's "Magic Words" and all the little letters from people who hate Marvel's Ultimate Universe books, I just have to say...SHUT UP!

Enough complaining about the Ultimate Universe. It's here to stay. If you don't like it, don't buy it. And if you're still having trouble understanding it, let me explain:

Marvel Comics is a business. As with any business, its main goal is to make money. It was like that in Stan Lee's day, and it's still like that in Bill Jemas' day.

Young kids don't want to read about Peter Parker and his marriage problems. Hell, I don't want to read about them either. People want to read about being a kid with superpowers, the same thing *you* did when you got into comics. I, for one, *love* the Ultimate line—great stories, and great twists on the original characters. It brought me back into comics.

The Ultimate Universe is here to stay. Your complaints fall on deaf ears.

**Damon Baker**
**diablo508@mchsi.com**

**It's amazing to me that your average fan-on-the-street seems so resistant to change, particularly regarding the Ultimate line. The same geeks who scream about how the status quo sucks and how they wish**

# HEY! IT'S PEN PALS...

Like a title? Hate a character? Just have something to say? Then write your favorite comic company and let 'em know what you're thinking. Send your thoughts to the following addresses, but be sure to send your letters in care of a particular book or editor. Power to the people!

**BLACK BULL ENTERTAINMENT**
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E-mail:
blackbullmail@aol.com

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Oldsmar, FL 34677
www.crossgen.com

**CRUSADE COMICS**
62 S. Main Street
Sayville, NY 11782
E-mail: aldercrusade@aol.com

**comics appealed to a wider audience gnash their teeth at the mere mention of "Ultimate Marvel." Hey, here's something that shakes up the status quo and is designed to appeal to a wider audience. *And* it's good readin'. What's not to like?**

**Dear J-Mac,**

Far be it from me to call any Amazon a playa, but Wonder Woman sure does seem to crush a lot.

We've already seen evidence that she's bound to get it on with Superman—in *Kingdom Come*, *DK2* and so on. Then there was that long flirtation with Aquaman in *JLA*. Now we see her and Batman locking lips in *JLA* #74, and even falling in battle while holding hands? What is up with that?

**Arturo Garcia**
**San Diego, CA**

**I dunno. Maybe since she's made of clay, she needs some warming up on the inside.**

**Maybe since she spent all that time on an island fulla chicks, a little masculine companionship is just what she's looking for these days.**

**And speaking as someone who touches the Amazon on a monthly basis (Hello!), *JLA* scribe Joe Kelly thinks he has an answer: "She's THE most eligible bachelorette in the DCU, so it's only natural for writers to want to see her hook up with someone," Kelly explains. "But more to the point, I think, is that Wonder Woman is so self-confident and assertive that she can follow her instincts and her heart without fear of rejection or failure. She can handle all the baggage of relationships without getting hurt, or hurting anyone in the process. In other words, Wonder Woman can play the field if she chooses because she carries her own protection."**

**Her own protection, Joe? "For her heart! Her *heart*, you perv!"**

**Jim,**

I'm a big fan of the magazine, but am increasingly concerned by the amount of column inches dedicated to pointless '80s cartoons.

"Transformers." "Battle of the Planets." "G.I Joe." "Thundercats." "He-Man." Good God, why do you think that these cartoons stopped being produced and disappeared by the '90s? Seriously, I beg you to watch an '80s episode of "He-Man." It wasn't even any good when you were 9 years old, let alone now.

America finally has some good writers—Brian Michael Bendis, Greg Rucka, Kevin Smith, Brian Azzarello and the lot. And what are you writing about? Cars that turn into robots?!

Read an issue of *Promethea*. Then read any issue of *Thundercats*. Then tell me what you think.

**Dave Mez**
**dave@theemptyhouse.freeserve.co.uk**

**I'll tell you what I think: I think *Promethea* is brilliant beyond brilliance. And I also don't give a fig about any of this cartoon stuff. Just not my bag, as I'm just a tad too old for it. But I remember my little brother loved all those cartoons.**

**And that's just the point. Just 'cause something ain't for you, that doesn't mean it's all hooey. Today's fans of my**

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www.imagecomics.com

# QUICK HITS

THE READERS STRIKE BACK!

I'm getting tired of seeing "X-Men" movie photos. Hey, didn't there used to be an *X-Men* comic once upon a time?

**—Carl Wilson, Baton Rogue, LA**

*Damn*, but Nightcrawler from the "X-Men" movie looks *creepy*! Great addition to the movie cast!

**—Thorton Compton, Myrtle Beach, SC**

The new *Batman* direction by Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee is a nice collection of splash pages. But is there anything else there?

**—Bob Bonny, Los Angeles, CA**

I love the new *Batman* by Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee! This book hasn't been this exciting in years!

**—Noree Christopher, Lake Oswego, NY**

Anytime you want to have a Joseph Michael Linsner cover on your magazine, I'm there. The "Ultimate Women" [*Wizard* #137] was another Linsner masterpiece!

**—Ronald Middleton, Macedonia, OH**

Joseph Michael Linsner's version of Mary Jane Watson on your #137 cover made her look the way she's *supposed* to–like a true teenaged girl, not a woman scaled down. Great job.

**—Melinda Colborn, Milwaukee, WI**

Hey, how about a look at *Blade of the Immortal* in your pages, the great Dark Horse manga? It's one of the best books being published.

**—Ken Ferguson, Orange, CA**

Enough "Marvel manga." Just enough. It isn't *real* manga, and it just doesn't look right.

**—Bobbi Rhoades, Brick, NJ**

I just don't understand this whole "Stan Lee sues Marvel" thing [*Wizard* #137]. It's embarrassing–like Ronald McDonald suing McDonald's.

**—Floyd Radford, Aberdeen, MD**

Your Galactus vs. JLA "Last Man Standing" in *Wizard* #137 was just stunning. Doug Mahnke and Tom Nguyen are one of the most underrated art teams in comics.

**—Baron Kentford, Parma, OH**

Nice to see Venom in the pages of *Ultimate Spider-Man* these days. It's been years since we've seen the character. Why'd it take so long?

**—Scott Lee, Ventura, CA**

With the loose talk of J. Michael Straczynski doing a *Dr. Strange* series, might John Romita Jr. do the art? He draws a *great* moody Doc!

**—Janine Smith, Salem, OR**

ULTIMATE MARY JANE

**little brother's age are eating this stuff up with a spoon. Let 'em.**

**Yes, Virginia, *Promethea* can peacefully coexist on the rack next to *Transformers*. And no blood need be shed. Relax. Have a Popsicle.**

**Geez. Leave it to the Brits to get surly. Look, the sun *has* set on your empire, and you can't cook. Live with it.**

## Dear Wizard,

I want to thank you guys for the little snippet on Skottie Young in *Wizard* #137. I've been reading his *Spider-Man: Legend of the Spider-Clan*, and I LOVE his artwork. His style is amazing!

Does Skottie have any other plans for the new year? And what work has he done in the past?

**Tim Kehler**
**tim_kehler@hotmail.com**

**Artist Skottie Young has been in the comics biz for, like, 20 minutes. His first pro work was on Marvel's *Iceman* #3, and he moved immediately to *Legend of the Spider-Clan*.**

**The new year should be bigger for Skottie, as he's now the regular cover artist on *Monster Club* from Autumn Press, he's got a tale forthcoming in *X-Men Unlimited* #41, and he'll be penciling *Hell* for Dark Horse's Rocket Comics.**

## Dear Jim,

I'm serving the U.S. Army here in Kuwait as part of "Operation Enduring Freedom." Can you provide me with *Gen*[13] artist Alé Garza's mailing address? I'm a big fan and I'd like to write him.

**PFC Jason Dement**
**APO AE 09303**

***Gen*[13] artist Alé Garza is serving WildStorm Productions as part of "Operation Draw Funnybooks." He can be reached at: WildStorm Productions, 888 Prospect St., #240, La Jolla, CA 92037.**

## Dear Wizard,

I'm a longtime reader of *Wizard* and am wondering what happened to the "Basic Training" column. For the past year or so, you guys have been somewhat inconsistent in including it in your magazine. I am an aspiring penciler, and those "Basic Training" segments have given me much inspiration over the years. In fact, I've actually kept every issue of *Wizard* that I have ever bought so that I can use them as a reference. It's been like my own little art correspondence course.

Although I probably wouldn't stop buying the mag, I would be greatly disappointed if you stopped including "Basic Training." Just let me know what's going down.

**James Plummer**
**jam1@unm.edu**

**"Basic Training" still pops up from time to time, largely when we have something very cool or special to showcase, such as when actual "Daredevil" storyboard artist Colin Grant showed us how he does movie storyboards in *Wizard* #133.**


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REMINDER REMINDER REMINDER!

# WINWINWINWIN!

# TALENT CONTEST UPDATE!

In *Wizard* #138, we asked aspiring pencilers, inkers and colorists to take their shot at becoming Top Cow Productions' next superstar, and there's still time to make your comic book career dreams come true. Ambitious talents can visit **TopCow.com** and download scripts to draw, penciled pages to ink or penciled and inked pages to color. One penciler, inker and colorist will win a six-month internship at Top Cow Productions in Los Angeles, where they'll work side-by-side with Top Cow's top artists, such as head honcho Marc Silvestri. In addition to the internship, all three winners receive a place to live, plus an airline ticket to get ya there! The three future comic book legends will also receive airfare and hotel accommodations to Wizard World Chicago 2003 (August 8-10, 2003), where they'll be introduced to the world as the contest winners at the Top Cow panel.

Please send us photocopies or digital files of your pencils, inks or colors (no originals please) to:

**Become a Top Cow Superstar**
**c/o Wizard Entertainment**
**P.O. Box 118**
**Congers, NY 10920-0118**

**Oh, yeah. Speaking of "special," the Grand Master Himself, Joe Kubert, will be kicking off six "Basic Trainings" in a row very, very soon right here in June's *Wizard* #142. Joe has been in the comics biz for 60 years and running the world-renown Joe Kubert School of Cartoon and Graphic Art for almost 30 years. Sit up straight, grab your pencil and learn from the master.**

**Yo, Jimbo,**

A friend of mine recently tried to tell me that "Attack of the Clones" was a better movie than "Spider-Man." Want to split the cost of a big hired goon named Guido to beat a little sense into him?

**Steven Paradise**
**gossamerka@hotmail.com**

**Yes. Yes, I would.**

**Hey Jim,**

I think Batman is smarter than Reed Richards. I bet Batman could do a lot more inventing, if only he wasn't so busy busting heads.

**Jason Gauthier**
**Vancouver, British Columbia**

**Yeah, that's the story of my life, too. My perpetual motion machine keeps getting pushed to the back burner while I whale on "Attack of the Clones" fans.**

**Well, that be that for another month. If you agree to meet back here in 30 days, I'll meet you halfway and do the same. Until then, I remain...**

**—Jim McLauchlin**

*Jim McLauchlin was bitten by a radioactive spider and all he got was this lousy T-shirt.*

**Send letters to:**
**Magic Words**
**151 Wells Ave.**
**Congers, NY 10920**
**or e-mail us at JMcLauch@aol.com**

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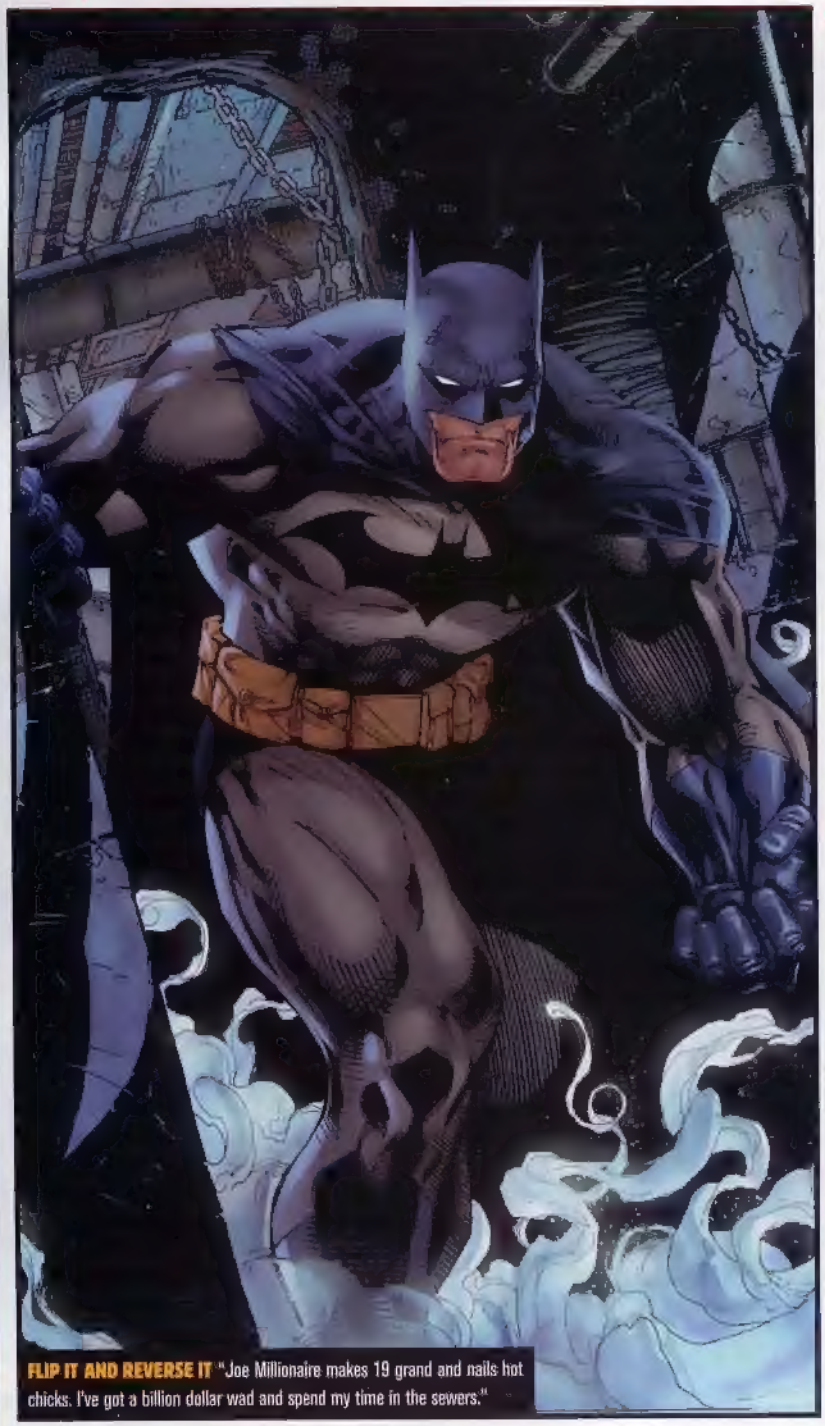
(Please include your full name, address and phone number and be as detailed as possible.)

# ANOTHER TURN AT BAT

## Lee, Loeb extend acclaimed 'Batman' run by six issues



**FLIP IT AND REVERSE IT** "Joe Millionaire makes 19 grand and nails hot chicks. I've got a billion dollar wad and spend my time in the sewers."

When DC wanted to get Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee to take on monthly creative duties on *Batman* for a year, it took a $1,000 bet—which the publisher ended up losing.

Luckily, when DC wanted the superstar creative duo to stay on for another six months, the stakes were considerably lower.

"[DC Vice President of Editorial] Dan DiDio was out [in L.A.] for the retailer's conference, and Jim and I met up with him, and he basically asked us, 'Well, what's it going to take to get you guys to stay on the book?'" recalled Loeb. "Jim and I had been talking about it a lot lately, so we said, 'You just have to ask.'"

With the success of *Batman* currently at a fever pitch, holding strong as Diamond's #1 selling title for the month of April, it's clear that Loeb and Lee have become DC's franchise players. In addition to turbo-boosting the title's sales, the dynamic duo has also offered up the "Hush" storyarc that's left fans pondering the question, "Who is the mystery villain?" (**see sidebar**).

Yet despite the fanfare, Loeb and Lee are equally surprised by the success of the run, which they never thought would last a year, let alone 18 months.

"I don't think any of us thought it was going to be a blockbuster, particularly given the marketplace," said Loeb. "Jim had always said that, if we really want people to remember this run, then it has to be at least 18 issues. That, if we do 12 or less, then people will sort of think of it as a mini-series. We still would've been happy doing 12, but so much of this from the very beginning began with Jim wanting to say to the comic book community that, 'I'm still a vital force, and this is something I really love and want to do.'"

Meanwhile, Lee is simply sur-

prised that he hasn't hit the proverbial wall in terms of his workload.

"The fact that I have this lead time, we have this cushion that allows me to do other things, take care of business, have vacation time, I don't feel that burned out," said Lee. "The fact that we're so far ahead, I still feel fresh right now and pretty confident."

**"I've been working in this business long enough to know when things are special and this collaboration is special."**
**–Jim Lee**

While both Loeb and Lee are naturally keeping the juicy details about what they have in store for the extra six issues under wraps, Loeb is quick to hint that Robin will play a key role in the upcoming issues, and that, like the year-long "Hush," the follow-up story will be a self-contained, six-issue storyarc. Meanwhile, the two veterans continue to enjoy learning about Gotham's colorful crime-fighters and criminals, despite having to make extreme sacrifices to do so.

"I have a full-time job on 'Smallville' so I have to find the time to do this other job—which I love—in writing comics," said Loeb. "For me the secret is, I look at my schedule and said, 'Sleep is not something I really need.' So I get no sleep, and it works out pretty well."

Yet Lee has found a way to continue running WildStorm, pencil *Batman* and maintain his sanity.

"I'm in the same boat that Jeph is; I've got a ton of stuff," said Lee. "Drawing a monthly book is a full-time gig, running WildStorm is a full-time gig, too. I work a lot of nights and I work almost every weekend, and that's how I do it."

Yet despite the grueling hours and black circles under their eyes, both Loeb and Lee are quick to admit that their run on the Dark Knight Detective will definitely be one they remember fondly once all is said and done (which fans hope won't be anytime soon). Above all else though, both creators are happy working with each other, and wouldn't have it any other way.

"Jeph's very hands on," praised Lee. "We'll have these crazy e-mail sessions where we kind of nitpick on the art, or he'll nitpick on the art and I'll nitpick on the writing. It's a really good, creative working relationship, and that doesn't happen all the time. I've been working in the business long enough to know when things are special and this collaboration is a special thing and doing more issues would be a complete pleasure and I look forward to it."

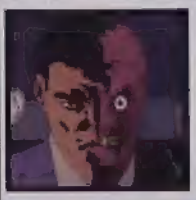
"Basically, all of this was based on Jim," said Loeb. "If Jim wanted to do it, I was there, and Jim wants to do it, so I'm there. I'm really lucky to be a part of this team."

■ CASEY SELLAS

# WHOISHUSH?

WOULD YOU SPEAK UP ALREADY?

As Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee's yearlong "Hush" storyarc reaches its midway point, fans are scratching their heads as to who the mystery villain might be. *Wizard* decided to analyze the evidence to develop a list of potential suspects and interrogate Loeb to see if he would roll over on the perp.



### TWO-FACE

**WHY?** Judging from *Long Halloween* and *Dark Victory*, it's clear Loeb loves him some Harvey Dent. Since Hush conceals his face, it makes sense Dent's a prime suspect.
**LOEB SEZ:** "Wouldn't that be cool? Maybe there's time to change...nah..."
**ODDS:** 5 to 1

### DR. THOMAS ELLIOT

**WHY?** A childhood friend of Bruce's who may still hold a grudge against the Wayne family after Bruce's father failed to save the life of Tommy's pop. Could this recently introduced character be out for vengeance?
**LOEB SEZ:** "A bit obvious, don't you think?"
**ODDS:** 7 to 1

### THE JOKER

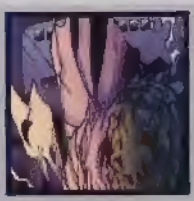
**WHY?** Loeb insists when Batman and Joker throw down in issues #613-#614, it will "answer a lot of questions" as to the characters' revamped relationship.
**LOEB SEZ:** "Never trust the Joker. But, he doesn't play well with others, does he?"
**ODDS:** 10 to 1

### LEX LUTHOR

**WHY?:** It seems Batman would rather get a high colonic than visit Metropolis anymore, so why else would he go unless it's to investigate the ever-shady Lex Luthor?
**LOEB SEZ:** "I keep saying having Lex in the White House is like the fox in the henhouse. Nobody listens."
**ODDS:** 15 to 1

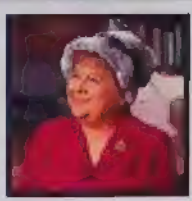
### CALENDAR MAN

**WHY?** Another one of Loeb's personal faves based on his Sale collaborations, it's clear that the ever-creepy Calendar Man has the mental capacity to pull off an assault on Bats.
**LOEB SEZ:** "Could he. Could HE?!"
**ODDS:** 30 to 1



### KILLER CROC

**WHY?** Maybe they just shop at the same costume shop, but didja notice that both Croc and Hush sport identical raincoats?
**LOEB SEZ:** "Jim Gordon wears the same coat, why didn't you put him on the list?"
**ODDS:** 100 to 1



### AUNT HARRIET

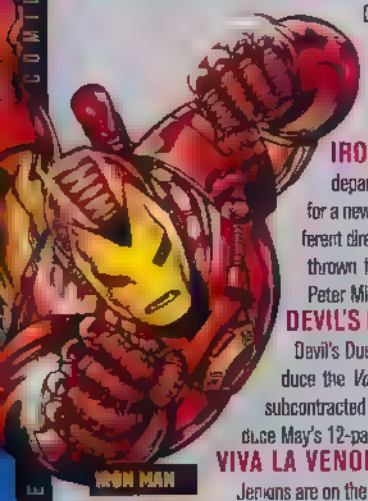
**WHY?** Lovable houseguest from the '60s "Batman" TV show or deranged psychopath?
**LOEB SEZ:** "She has motive...opportunity...and–wait, what are you guys smoking?! That was a 'television' show–not the REAL Batman!"
**ODDS:** 1,000,000 to 1 ■ CS

# THE BUZZBIN



**GO GO GAIMAN** *Sandman* creator Neil Gaiman's much-anticipated Marvel project is steaming forward with penciler Andy Kubert (*Origin*) reportedly completing issue #4 of the series, which was recently expanded to eight issues. Marvel is currently looking at a fall release for the tentatively titled *1602*, which grants Gaimain full access to the entire stable of Marvel Universe characters.

**SCOTLAND YARD** Scottish creators Mark Millar (*Ultimate X-Men*) and Frank Quitely are reportedly working on a creator-owned project for Marvel. Quitely will pencil the three-issue series instead of hopping back on *New X-Men* with Grant Morrison.



IRON MAN

**IRON GIANT** With writer Mike Grell's departure from *Iron Man*, Marvel's looking for a new scribe to take the series in a very different direction. One well-known writer's already thrown his hat in the ring though—*X-Statix*'s Peter Milligan.

**DEVIL'S DREAM** While the *G.I. Joe* team at Devil's Due Studios snagged the license to produce the *Voltron* comic book, the creators have subcontracted Pat Lee's Dreamwave Studios to produce May's 12-page prequel to the series.

**VIVA LA VENOM** Looks like Daniel Way and Paul Jenkins are on the same wavelength. According to Way his bold new treatment of Venom in the upcoming Tsunami event (see page 66) fits perfectly with Jenkin's plans for Venom's summer guest appearance in *Peter Parker: Spider-Man*. Although the two books won't cross over directly, expect the scribes to take the psychotic Spidey-basher in parallel directions.

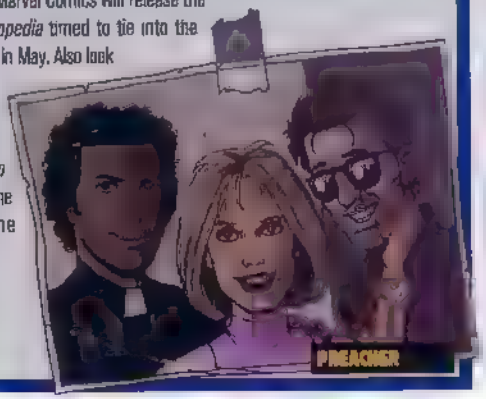
**PREACHER RETURNS?** Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon, the creative force behind the classic Vertigo series *Preacher*, may return to their Vertigo roots in mid-2003. Sources say the two plan an all-new ongoing mature readers title that could pick up where *Preacher* left off.

**JIM COMES HOME** After brief cameos in both *Detective Comics* and *GCPD*, rumor has it former Gotham City Police Commissioner Jim Gordon will be returning to the Bat-fold with his own series, which could see stands as early as summer 2003.

**VAUGHAN'S WORLD** After the wild success of Vertigo's *Y—The Last Man*, 2003 looks to be a busy year for series creator Brian K. Vaughan. The writer is reportedly lined up for several DC projects as well as more creator-owned projects for the publisher's many imprints.

**ALMOST THERE** When Marvel and DC were trying to work a deal with CrossGen to keep superstar artist George Pérez on *JLA/Avengers* instead of splitting time between his Marvel/DC work and his CrossGen responsibilities, the idea of teaming CrossGen's Mystic with Marvel's Dr. Strange and DC's Zatanna in a one-shot was floated but eventually scuttled.

**WORLD BOOK** After the huge success of the 240-page hardcover *Marvel Encyclopedia*, Marvel Comics will release the *X-Men Encyclopedia* timed to tie into the "X-Men 2" film in May. Also look for the House of Ideas to launch *The Official Guide to the Hulk* near the release of the "Hulk" film.



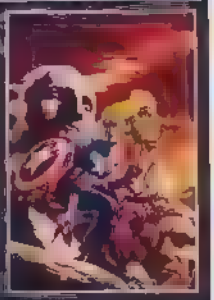
PREACHER

# HOT READS

## 5 BOOKS WE CAN'T WAIT TO PICK UP

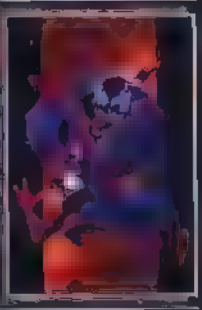
**Every month at *Wizard*, our editors read through hundreds of comic books. And like all fans, we get psyched about upcoming storylines and creative changes. Here are the five books that we are champing at the bit to read and why you should pick them up, too!**

**[illegible]** There's never been a definitive Chris Claremont/John Byrne-type run by any creative team on Earth's Mightiest Heroes, but writer Geoff Johns and upcoming artist Olivier Coipel—who comes onboard with March's issue #65—could be a legendary run in the making. Johns' first story arc, "World Trust," kicked major ass, and after seeing Coipel's early *Avengers* pages, this creative pairing could go down in history.



**LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN #6** This issue wraps up the second go-round for Alan Moore's literary superheroes, this time battling a massive invasion from Mars that could wipe out all life on Earth! How can Victorian-era technology possibly hope to thwart disintegration beams? With a League member slated to die and no *League III* on the horizon, grab this issue and hold on for dear life.

**[illegible]** These issues conclude the "Ultimate Venom" storyline, which we've been living to death! Writer Brian Michael Bendis has brilliantly tied both Eddie Brock and Venom's origins into Peter Parker's personal life, and we can't wait to see the payoff when the biological "smart suit" decides it no longer needs Peter as a host! Fangs for the memories, Venom.



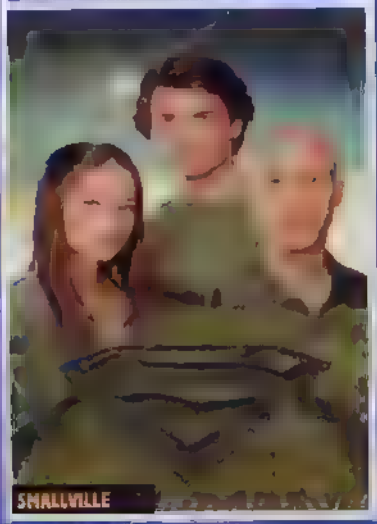
**JSA #48** We look forward to *JSA*'s sweeping, epic storylines with the anticipation of five-year-olds at Christmas, and we're betting the five-part "Princes of Darkness" storyline will deliver. Supervillains Mordru the Magician and Obsidian—Sentinel's twisted son—team up to exact revenge on the entire JSA! Co-writer Geoff Johns promises sweeping changes by the end of this arc and we can't wait to see how it shakes down.

**[illegible]** Writer Brian K. Vaughan (*Y—The Last Man*) crafted a deftly told tale using second-rate X-Man Shamber, so we can't wait to see what he does with the big guns like the movie versions of Wolverine and Sabretooth. Plus, this tale takes place, continuity-wise, between the X-movies, so you'll get to find out what Logan was up to before the events of "X2."

# NEWSFLASHES

UPDATES AND RELEASES FROM AROUND THE INDUSTRY

**GRANT MAN TO SMALLVILLE** Following the [illegible] of Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale's one-shot, DC announced they will debut an all-new *Superman* ongoing series this March, written by "Smallville" writers Mark Verheiden and Clint Carpenter, with art by Kilian Plunkett (*Legion Worlds*) and Mark Morales. Each issue will offer up [illegible] and behind-the-scenes photos.




**COVER UP** In response to fan and retailer outcry [illegible] Marvel Comics announced that all Ultimate title covers [illegible] *Ultimate Spider-Man* #36.

**BLOODY GREAT** Adam Heller has to make a [illegible] as a blood-sucking vampire. That's the hook of writer [illegible] (*Sleeper*, *Transmetropolitan*, *Tom Strong*, *Planetary*, *Global Frequency*, *Desolation Jones*). Starting in March, *Blood and Water* follows Heller who, after contracting hepatitis B, decides to pass on the painful medical treatments and live forever as a vampire.

**[illegible] MARVEL** [illegible] Marvel [illegible] Spider-Man [illegible] transported [illegible] motion to dismiss the case. A court date has not been set.

**ANTE UP** The Authority returns this March in an all-new, three-part mini-series titled "The Authority [illegible]"

# CHARACTER TO WATCH

## DR. DOOM

For years, fans have come to accept the fact that, try as he might, Dr. Doom just can't take down the Fantastic Four.

Mark Waid plans to change that.

When series penciler Mike Wieringo's revamped Dr. Doom makes his highly anticipated appearance in March's *Fantastic Four* #67, not only will he be sporting a streamlined, badder-than-ever look, but a whole new attitude as well, one that should have that accursed Richards shaking in his unstable molecule boots.

"Issue #67 is a stand-alone story, which sets up Doom's objectives, goals and methods for the ultimate defeat of the Fantastic Four–and specifically Reed Richards," explained Waid. "A lot of people on the 'Net have already kind of figured out what he's got planned, but as I've said before, there are methods and means at hand, but we've never really seen him explore them to their fullest extent."

# HEAT INDEX

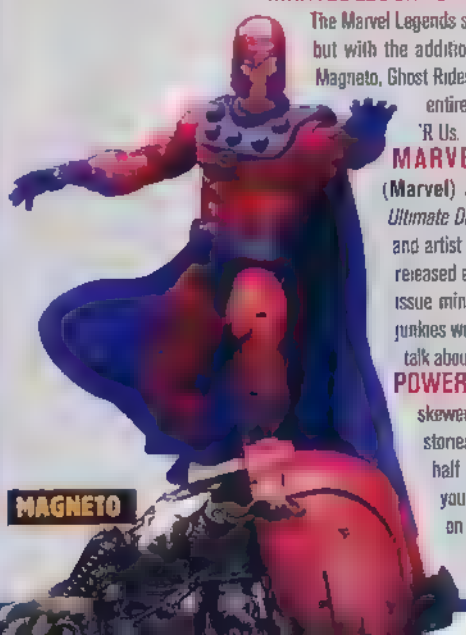
**No one loves comics like *Wizard*, so here's some cool things we read and saw this month.**

**RIOT AT XAVIER'S (Marvel)** The newest *New X Men* arc by writer Grant Morrison didn't just see the return of superstar artist Frank Quitely–it also saw the return of the stories we love Morrison to tell. With Xavier's students on a new drug and convinced Magneto made more sense than Xavier ever did, the students rise up and begin a civil war inside the X-home.

**ULTIMATE BLACK WIDOW (Marvel)** Hot damn! We always knew Natasha Romanoff (a.k.a. Black Widow) was a force to be reckoned with, but after her action-packed sequence in *Ultimates* #8 that made "The Matrix" look like an after-school special, our collective jaws dropped to the floor.

**CROSSGEN TRAVELERS (CrossGen)** The new eight-inch by five-inch CrossGen trade paperbacks are simply amazing. They're the perfect size to stuff in a book bag or even a back pocket. And the amazing art of the CrossGen team doesn't suffer at a smaller size, since every color, line and word balloon is as easy to read as normal comic book size.

**MARVEL LEGENDS WAVE III (Toy Biz)** Talk about power. The Marvel Legends series of toys are already a smash hit, but with the addition of a super-articulated Wolverine, Magneto, Ghost Rider and Thor, it won't be long before the entire Marvel Universe is available at Toys 'R Us.




**MARVEL TRADE PAPERBACKS (Marvel)** Just one week after the hit series *Ultimate Daredevil/Elektra* by writer Greg Rucka and artist Salvador Larroca wrapped up, Marvel released a trade paperback version of the four-issue mini. With a turnaround that quick, TPB junkies won't have to shield their ears as friends talk about the latest hot series week after week.

**POWERS #27 (Image)** Brian Michael Bendis skewers the Silver Age in one of the funniest stories we've read in a long time! The first half of the story looks like any S.A. tale you've read–including pixelized color dots on the art–but the word balloons are laced with enough profanity and crudeness to make a truck driver blush!

UPDATES AND RELEASES FROM AROUND THE INDUSTRY

**S'EHS KAANI** Zatanna, DC's resident hack-[illegible] helped Earth out of many a jam...but can she find a boyfriend? Find out in March's *Zatanna: Everyday Magic* [illegible] by Paul Dini (*JLA: Secret Origins*) with art by Rick [illegible] moonlighting as a successful Vegas stage performer in desperate need of a man in her life.

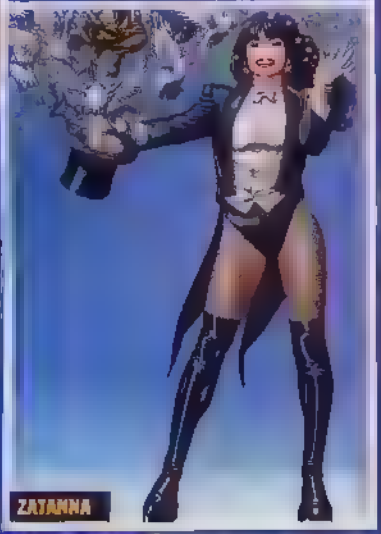


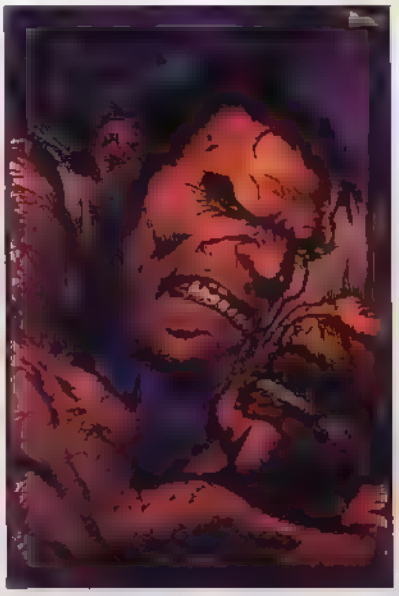

**IMAGE-IAN** Kicking off this April, Image [illegible] with [illegible] killer Kevin Gunstone (set in a post-Apocalyptic [illegible] (a four-issue mini-series about a mysterious sword that unites five different people); *Ratogin: Junkbot* [illegible] underground robot fights) and *Sons of the Samurai* by Will Dixon (a four-issue series which follows the adventures of a young samurai on a quest for enlightenment).

**FADE TO BLACK** This April, Fabian Nicieza [illegible] artist Stefano Raffaele for the four-part mini-series *Blackburne Covenant* from Dark Horse [illegible] list Richard Kaine. Not a demented fan, not [illegible] book was really non-fiction.

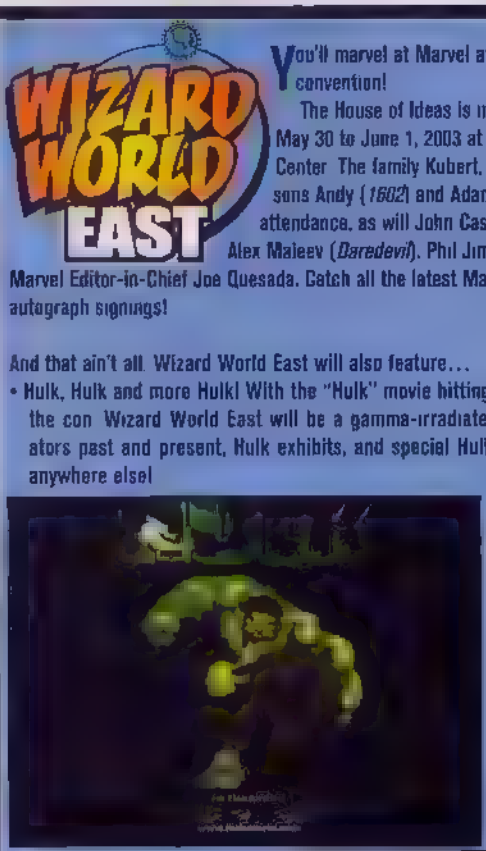
# WHERE IN THE WORLD IS WOLVIE?

With X-Men 2" opening on May 2, Marvel will be cranking up the exposure needle to 10 for Wolverine as they attempt to cash in on the high-profile movie sequel with a slew of comic crossovers and appearances for everybody's favorite brawling Canadian. Can you tell which one of these appearances is a fake?

1) Wolverine goes to a diner in Portland, Oregon, eats lots of high-carb food and only uses his claws for personal hygiene and silverware.
2) Losing his memory, Wolverine begins to reform Alpha Flight only to learn he's been fooled by the Canadian Government into forming a special black ops team to fight terrorism in his homeland.
3) Trapped in a barren wasteland, Logan comes closer and closer to losing his humanity—until he pulls a Pete Townsend and meets a young Asian girl.
4) Wolverine takes his adopted niece to the carnival and goes wild, killing lots of performers, thus ruining a perfectly good Sunday for everyone.
5) Wolverine teams up with X-Statix's Doop to drink a few beers, get a massage and drink more beer before the two race off for more massages and possibly the famous "happy ending."



#2 is False—Lamebrains are dumb. They couldn't float anyone. Who would believe that?




You'll marvel at Marvel at the Wizard World East 2003 convention!

The House of Ideas is in the house in a big way from May 30 to June 1, 2003 at the Pennsylvania Convention Center. The family Kubert, dad Joe (*Sgt. Rock*) and sons Andy (*1602*) and Adam (*Ultimate X-Men*) will be in attendance, as will John Cassaday (*Captain America*), Alex Maleev (*Daredevil*), Phil Jimenez (*New X-Men*) and Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada. Catch all the latest Marvel happenings, panels, and autograph signings!

And that ain't all. Wizard World East will also feature...

- Hulk, Hulk and more Hulk! With the "Hulk" movie hitting screens hot on the heels of the con, Wizard World East will be a gamma-irradiated pivot point with Hulk creators past and present, Hulk exhibits, and special Hulk merchandise you can't get anywhere else!



- Yummy-nummy exclusives! Check out the "Tuxedo Bunsen & Beaker" from the white-hot Palisades Toys "Muppets" line, available ONLY at Wizard World East!
- Guest of Honor Alex Ross! It's your chance to meet the man, and see behind the scenes of *Battle of the Planets* and his new 2003 super-project, *JLA: Liberty and Justice*.

Tickets ($20 for 1 day, $40 for 3 days) can be purchased online at www.wizardconventions.com.

# CHRIS CAN'T MISS 'GOD LOVES' SEQUEL

## Claremont to pen sequel to acclaimed 1982 X-Men tale about William Stryker

Since director Bryan Singer's getting to make a highly anticipated "X Men" sequel for May, longtime and fan-favorite X-Men scribe Chris Claremont felt it was only fair he got one, too.

"If I was going to make an X-Men film, this is what I'd do," said Claremont, who along with artist Salvador Larroca, will begin a four-issue sequel to the classic *God Loves, Man Kills* graphic novel with May's *X-Treme X Men* #25.

The original 1982 graphic novel, which is loosely being translated for May 2's "X-Men 2" film, centered around a religious extremist named William Stryker and his army of Purifiers, who set out to destroy all mutants. According to Claremont, the sequel will play off the theme, "If you could go back in time and kill Adolf Hitler as an infant, would you? And more importantly, should you?"

"This story will bring everyone up against someone who is potentially more dangerous to the world than anyone of Hitler's ilk," explained the writer. "But he's not evil at this point—he's just a kid. What do you do if every indicator is that no matter what you do, it's going to be a disaster? Do you try to help or do you try to put a bullet in his head?"

Claremont revealed in many ways the new *X Treme X Men* arc will explore the polar opposite themes of the original graphic novel.

"With the original novel, you had a human trying to annihilate mutant kind for the protection of the species," said Claremont. "Here you have a mutant whose power and biological imperative will quickly cleanse the world of everyone who isn't a mutant. What do you do?" ■ **MIKE COTTON**

TIME TO TOON THINGS UP A NOTCH.
Darkness
Witchblade
HITCHBLADE
ANIMATED
ACTION FIGURES
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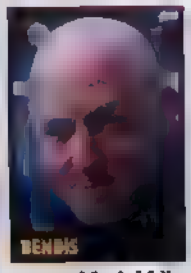
# BENDIS FINALLY SEES 'X' APPEAL

## 'Ultimate X-Men' stint to lead to 'secret' Ultimate projects


BENDIS

It took over two years—and a little help from a friend—but Brian Michael Bendis is finally writing *Ultimate X-Men*.

Bendis, who was originally tapped to write both *Ultimate Spider-Man* and *Ultimate X-Men* but turned down the X-gig because he didn't think a team book was his speed, will take over *Ultimate X Men* from writer Mark Millar with May's issue #33.

"I wasn't ever opposed to doing a team book, I just couldn't figure them out," explained Bendis, who will be joined by artist David Finch (*Aphrodite IX*). "Honestly, it's kind of haunted me the whole time. I didn't like not doing it, you know? I can't say that a week has gone by that the fact that I couldn't wrap my head around *Ultimate X-Men* hadn't bothered me."

Never one to give up, Bendis and *Queen & Country* scribe Greg Rucka began talking about writing a stint on *Ultimate X-Men* together but before long, it became a solo project for Bendis.

"Greg and I started to write it together but he started talking about having five monthly books and a novel to write," chuckled Bendis. "As it came down to actually typing the thing, he just couldn't do it. So, I'm doing it but there is definitely Greg Rucka in there."

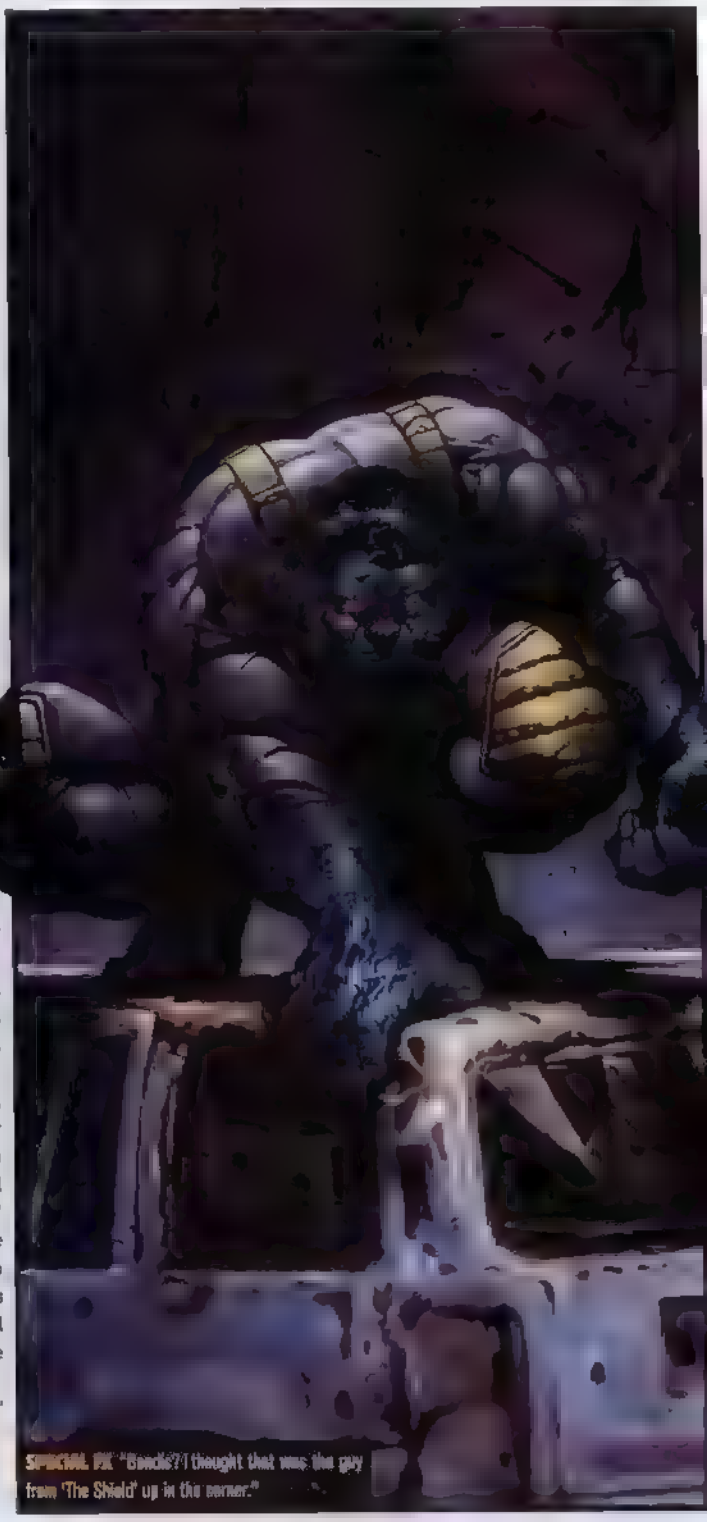
According to the writer, while all of the *Ultimate X-Men* cast will appear, the main focus of his six-issue story is on Wolverine—and, of course, Spider-Man.

"It's a Wolverine story and I don't want to give away the larger aspects but the cool thing is that it's very Ultimate Universe focused," said Bendis. "The first issue, and most of the story, guest stars Ultimate Spider-Man so much so that *Ultimate Spider-Man* fans would be remiss not to pick it up. Not only is it Spider-Man, but it's Peter and Mary Jane. You get to see the very-much-asked-for Wolverine/Mary Jane conversation—the standoff. It's very Ultimate Spider-Man-focused to start and then it shifts into Ultimate X-Men gear. It'll give you a nice sense of how these characters interact and live in the same world.

"Honestly, the first issue is so Spider-Man heavy, I'll get crapped on," continued Bendis. "It's a very charming debut of a story though. But then as the story continues, you get other people from the Marvel Universe—lots of guest stars—it'll be very exciting."

Fans shouldn't expect Bendis' time on *Ultimate X-Men* to become permanent though, according to the writer. With a full load of four top-selling books including *Alias*, *Daredevil*, *Ultimate Spider-Man* and *Powers* and other Marvel work planned in 2003, the writer just won't have time.

"This will lead to other Ultimate Universe projects," teased the writer. "The little germ genesis of this that Rucka and I came up with stemmed from other Ultimate secret projects that I'm working on that open other doors to other story ideas. This is kind of a prequel to that kind of storytelling. I'm being very secretive and covert—but there's another project coming out later this year that kind of spins this off." ■ MC


SPECIAL FX: "Bendis?! I thought that was the guy from 'The Shield' up in the corner."

# GAIMAN LAWSUIT HEATS UP

The legal battle between *Spawn* creator Todd McFarlane and *Sandman* creator Neil Gaiman over the rights to *Miracleman* looks to be winding down—and heating up.

In mid-January, Federal District Judge John C. Shabaz, handed down a "Second Amended Judgment" that still doesn't clear up just who owns the rights to the Alan Moore-created character but does bring Gaiman one step closer to a deal that could see all rights to the character in the hands of Gaiman's Marvels and Miracles LLC.

The verdict awarded Gaiman $45,000 for the unauthorized use of his name, likeness and bio on the *Angela's Hunt* trade paperback. The verdict also awards ownership of the characters of Medieval Spawn, Cogliostro and Angela to Gaiman, whose authorship will also have to be credited in future editions of *Spawn* #26, *Angela* #1-#3, and *Spawn* #9.

But while Gaiman was winning in the courts, McFarlane announced TMP would produce a Miracleman resin statue in April — a product Gaiman's camp would say TMP doesn't have the right to produce. While neither Gaiman nor McFarlane would comment, speculation has begun that a deal may be struck between the two sides to trade the rights to Miracleman for Gaiman's shares of the *Spawn* characters he created. ■ MC

# FIRESTORM A BREWIN'

When your body's composed of pure, nuclear energy, day-to-day life can be a hassle.

However, when writer Mike Carey (*Hellblazer*) and rookie penciler Lewis Larosa take on creative duties of the all new *Firestorm* ongoing series at DC this August, they're planning on giving the Nuclear Man one more headache—a major identity crisis.

"We're going to be pushing the concept of Firestorm in a new direction, and taking some liberties with the concept of a superhero who is potentially a superteam," explained Carey, referring to Professor Martin Stein and high school student Ronnie Raymond, the two characters who make up the hero known as Firestorm. "I guess the first question I asked myself when I started thinking about the book was, 'Why stop at two characters [sharing Firestorm's body]?' And we don't. You're going to see several new faces of Firestorm, and some weird stuff going on behind them."

In addition to Carey giving Firestorm some new voices inside his head—some of which he hints are old Firestorm villains—the writer also plans on revisiting what made the series popular when it originally debuted in the '80s.

"I remember reading the original series and loving the character," said Carey. "I wanted to incorporate a lot of those elements in my run. This is going to be big-idea, Technicolor superheroics with mind-blowing concepts. There will be moments that will be thought-provoking or even disturbing, but overall, this will be a superhero book with larger-than-life characters and an emphasis on fast paced action." ■ CS

# DRESSED TO KILL

## DC offers a sneak peek at the new 'Teen Titans'

Forget everything you think you know about the new look of DC's upcoming *Teen Titans* revamp.

No seriously, forget it.

"The final costumes haven't been seen yet," said upcoming series penciler Mike McKone. "Simply because I haven't drawn them yet. The promotional cover that was released did not contain the final costume designs. They were close, but not quite."

So while DC, or rather McKone, keeps secret what the new lineup of Superboy, Cyborg, Robin, Starfire, Raven, Wonder Girl, Beast Boy and Impul—er, Kid Flash, will be sportin' in July's revamp, the publisher did offer up a behind-the-scenes look at the approval process involving McKone, writer Geoff Johns (*Avengers* and what seems like two-thirds of DC's superhero titles), and editor Eddie Berganza.

So enjoy, and to all you high school readers remember: Even though the new Titans may look badass in the comic, that doesn't necessarily mean the look will work in the real world. We've learned from experience

### SUPERBOY

For Superboy's new look, McKone, Johns and Berganza decided to go for a more back-to-basics approach.

"They've already changed Superboy's look recently because he had a look from 1993 with the earring and fade haircut, but we started to worry that that look might get dated too," explained Johns. "We decided to go for a more 'classic' look that would feel timeless. Since he's living in Smallville now, we wanted to make him look like a normal kid. A more jeans-and-T-shirt look."

### CYBORG

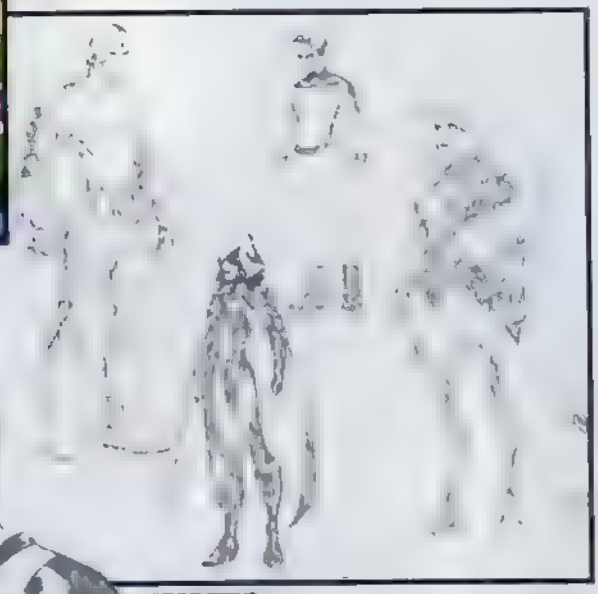
McKone, who admits that the Marv Wolfman/George Perez run of the 1980s was one of the only comics he read as a kid, adopted his predecessor's initial design with a few tweaks.

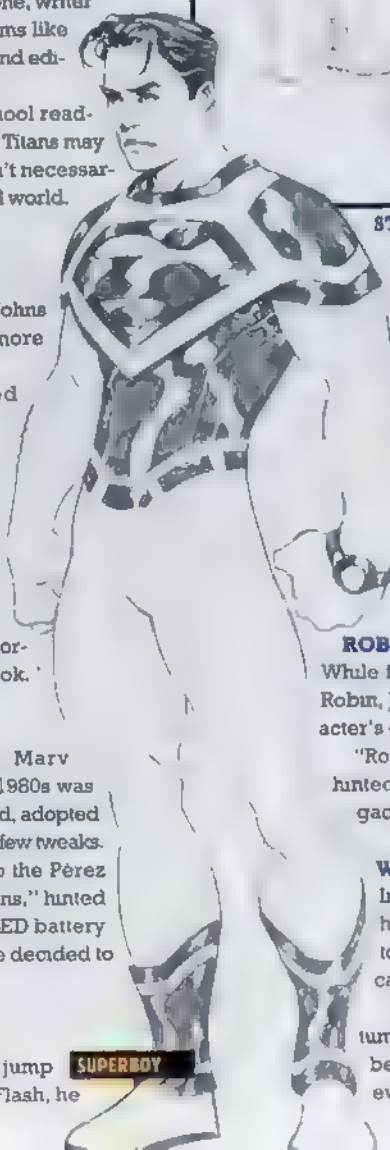
"Cyborg will be pretty close to the Perez design, with a couple of modifications," hinted McKone. "We're giving him little LED battery indicators all over his body. And we decided to get rid of the garter belt."

### KID FLASH

When Bart Allen finally makes the jump from li'l Impulse to full grown Kid Flash, he won't be cuttin' that hair anytime soon.

"Impulse, or rather Kid Flash, will probably end up looking the same," said McKone. "I don't think there's any real differences except a big white line around the red and yellow areas."






### STARFIRE

Along with the Princess of Tamaran taking on a more utilitarian look, McKone admits that he had one other idea that he wouldn't take no for an answer on. "I insisted on the thigh-high boots," said McKone.

### BEAST BOY

From the way McKone talks, Beast Boy's development must have been a time-consuming, utterly frustrating process.

"I got lucky," McKone said. "The first costume I designed, Eddie liked. From there, I just practiced drawing Beast Boy."

### ROBIN

While fans shouldn't expect any major changes to Robin, Johns admits that certain aspects of the character's design will take a more prominent role.

"Robin's going to use his utility belt a lot more," hinted Johns. "So he's going to have a lot of cool gadgets to play with."

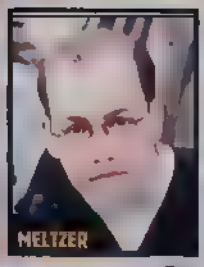
### WONDER GIRL

In addition to having a latch on her belt to hold her own magic lasso, Wonder Girl's also going to need to have a utility belt—to hold her credit cards thanks to her ever-changing costumes.

"She's a girl, so she'll be changing her costume quite a bit," said Johns. "Her costume has been an evolving process, and it'll continue to evolve throughout the series." ■CS

SIZZLING 'ARROW' WRITER FIRES OFF HIS LIST OF UPCOMING PROJECTS

# BRADTOTHE BONE

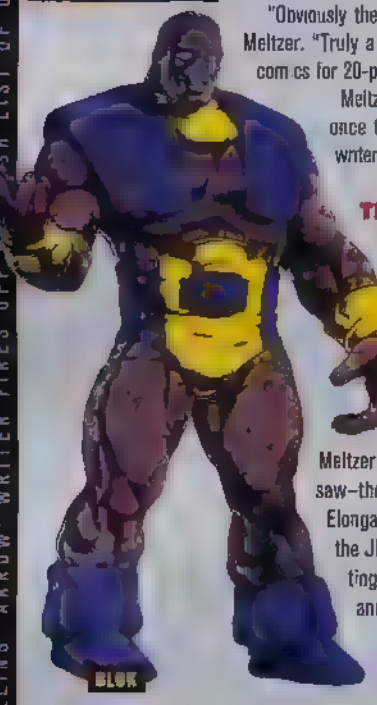



Brad Meltzer has managed to achieve what was long thought impossible—fill Kevin Smith's shoes.

After surprising skeptical *Green Arrow* fans who assumed the book would falter once Smith left the title, Meltzer has wowed the nay-sayers with his six-part "Archer's Quest" storyarc, which still has fans reeling after February's shocking conclusion. Now, those doubters want to know what the lawyer-turned-novelist-turned-comic writer has in store for his next project. Unfortunately, it won't be a comic as Meltzer plans on finishing his next, as-yet-untitled novel.

"Obviously the *Green Arrow* run has just been a thrill to me," said Meltzer. "Truly a dream come true for a person who's been reading comics for 20-plus years."

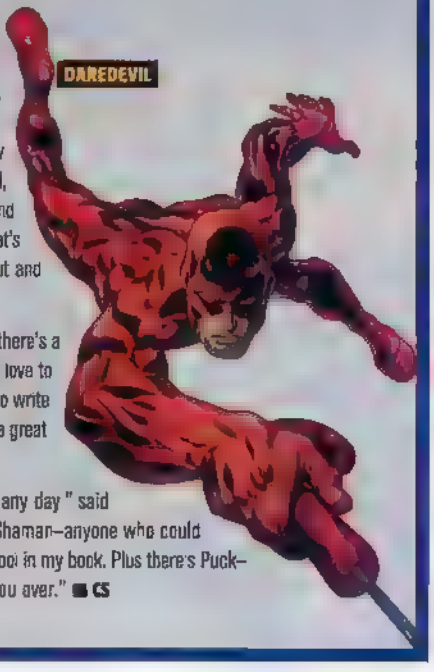
Meltzer assures his fans that he will indeed return to comics once the novel is finished, so *Wizard* caught up with the writer to find out what books he'd like to take a crack at next.




**TEEN TITANS** "I would take that in a heartbeat," said Meltzer. "On some level I would be doing what Geoff [Johns] is already doing. I'd bring back Cyborg, Raven, Starfire, make Impulse into Kid Flash. I'd do it exactly like that and so you don't need me on that title. But the Wolfman and Pérez run, growing up, that run shaped me as a writer."

**JLA** "Another one I'd take in a heartbeat," said Meltzer. "For me, I'd love to see—and always loved when you saw—the second-tier JLAers, like Hawkman, Zatanna, the Elongated Man, the Atom and Firestorm. I'd love to JSA ize the JLA and see good character moments with heroes sitting around talking through what it means to be a hero and that realm."

**LEGION** "I'm a huge Legion fan—no question," exclaimed Meltzer. "I'd bring back the Blok/Wildfire kind of friendship/relationship . . whatever you want to call it. That was just one of the greatest things to me. Just the dry humor of a walking rock and this mass of energy that wasn't human in a containment suit. That is to me what friendship is."




**DAREDEVIL** "Daredevil is just plain obvious to me—I'm a lawyer, he's a lawyer, and lawyers love to write about themselves," laughed Meltzer. "The most fun for me would be, who's the man behind the mask? I would love to get into the law school way of thinking in his brain. With that said, I'd love to go back to the old days with Daredevil and explore the times with Stick because, to me, that's where the lawyer part of his brain was taken out and replaced with something a little more potent."

**BATMAN** "Batman I'd love to do because there's a part of me that loves to write thrillers and would love to write a good mystery, and Batman's the person to write it with just because he's so full of character and a great detective on top of that," said Meltzer.

**ALPHA FLIGHT** "I'd take Alpha Flight any day," said Meltzer. "They just had such a cool look, and Shaman—anyone who could pull an elephant out of a small pouch, that was cool in my book. Plus there's Puck—a dwarf that could do cartwheels and knock you over." ■ CS

# T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS STORM BACK

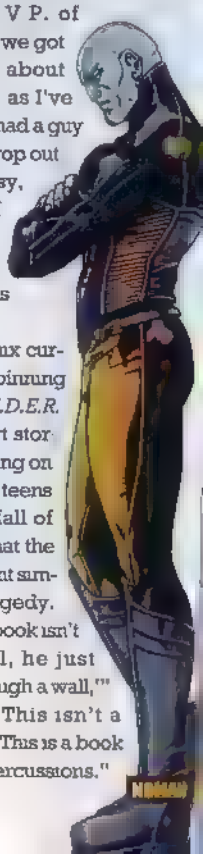
When Marc Andreyko heard he got the writing gig on DC's upcoming *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents* ongoing series, he didn't look at old issues of the comic for ideas.

He just looked at the world around him.

"By no means is *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents* didactic or a 'message book,'" said Andreyko, who fans may recognize as the co-writer on the award-winning mini-series *Torso*. "At the same time, DC's given me the ability to explore all sorts of issues under the guise of these superheroes. I can explore racism, homophobia and religion with these weird powers as a metaphor."

Joined by rookie penciler Max Fiumara, *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents* (which debuts in June) revisits the long-forgotten superteam introduced in the '60s who gained powers through a series of mystical weapons and accessories. For Andreyko, landing writing responsibilities on *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents* has been a dream assignment that he landed by pure luck.

"Last year at San Diego, I was hanging out at a bar with my friend Ben Raab, and we were talking to this guy about the current state of comics," said Andreyko. "It turns out it was [DC V.P. of Editorial] Dan DiDio. So we got to talking and I asked about T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents, as I've always been a fan. They had a guy lined up, but he had to drop out because he was too busy, then I got a bunch of information sent to me on the project and came up with a hundred ideas right there."




Andreyko plans to mix current events with head-spinning superheroics in *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents*. The first six-part storyarc finds the Agents taking on a gang of superpowered teens holding Minnesota's Mall of America's hostage in what the writer refers to as an event similar to the Columbine tragedy.

"The violence in this book isn't going to be, 'Oh cool, he just knocked somebody through a wall,'" advised Andreyko. "This isn't a Schwarzenegger movie. This is a book where violence has repercussions." ■ CS

# MUTANT PERSECUTION CONTINUES

## Court orders inhumane treatment for mutants; Prof. X stunned

And mutant protestors have said it for years, but for the first time the U.S. government agrees—mutants are not human.

In mid-January, Judge Judith Barzilay of the U.S. Court of International Trade ruled that Wolverine, Beast, Jean Grey, and even heroes such as the Avengers and Fantastic Four, are not human and therefore exempt to certain tariffs.

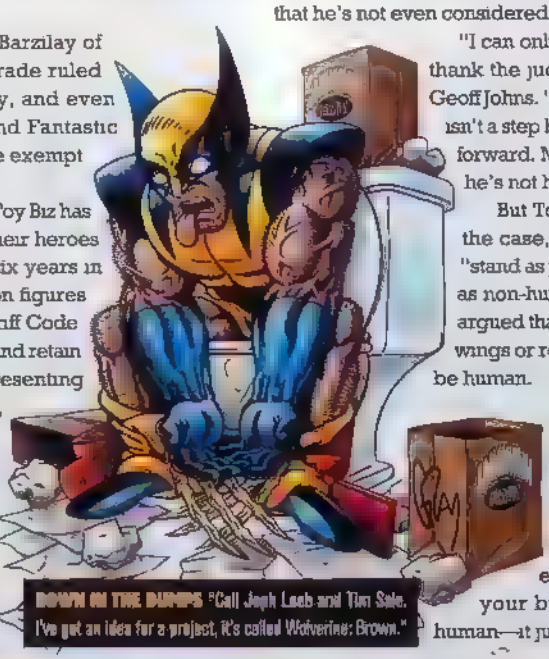
Marvel Enterprises subsidiary Toy Biz has been involved in a push to have their heroes declared non-human for almost six years in order to lower duty rates on action figures imported from China. The U.S. Tariff Code states that human figures are dolls, and retain a higher tariff, while figures representing animals or creatures, such as monsters or robots, are toys.

"Does it really matter what this means for meta-human rights?" asked *Uncanny X-Men* writer Chuck Austen. "All I know is it's a great thing for human rights. I guess this means everyone will wish Magneto hadn't died. All those X-Men are going to be very sorry they didn't side with him now. Charles Xavier might have to change his dream now that he's not even considered human."

"I can only imagine that Magneto would thank the judge," added *Avengers* scribe Geoff Johns. "He'd support the decision. This isn't a step back for mutant rights; it's a step forward. Magneto wants everyone to say he's not human—he's above humans."

But Toy Biz saw it differently during the case, stating its superhero figures "stand as potent witnesses for their status as non-human creatures." The company argued that figures with "tentacles, claws, wings or robotic limbs," simply could not be human.

"Sometimes you have to look past what's on the outside," said *Ultimate Spider-Man* and upcoming *Ultimate X-Men* scribe Brian Michael Bendis. "Just because you have three eyes, a tail or can shoot cats out of your butt doesn't mean you're not human—it just means you're a freak." ■ MC



**DOWN IN THE DUMPS** "Call Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale. I've got an idea for a project, it's called Wolverine: Brown."

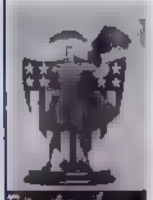
# FRONTPAGENEWS

CONFOUNDING COVER LINES

## Covers that caught our eye...and ire

Mark Twain once called golf "a good walk spoiled." Apparently the Batman Family would have to agree. Introducing Mr. Fun in *Batman Family* #7, the new villain tees off on Nightwing's head—even Tiger Woods would call a two-stroke penalty on this cover tag line: "Mulligan of Death!"

**BEST COMICS & HOBBY CENTER**



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# MESSAGE BOARD MANIA

ELECTRONIC ILLITERACY

## What we saw the last time we stopped in a comic chat room

**ComXfan:** hey, first time posting. this is cool. have you guys heard about the new invaders series from marvel?

**RichHead:** you know whats invading my comic store? yu gi oh. anime sucks.

**PCPete:** have you ever even read manga?

**ComXfan:** the invaders were the avengers of world war two.

**RichHead:** i dont have to read anime to know it sucks.

**JoMama:** i have a girlfriend in canada named yugi.

**EfYu2:** i just got back from canada and the comic book stores are soooo much better there. no toys or gaming crap. just comics.

**PCPete:** you don t even know what youre talking about. anime is tv and movies. manga is comic books.

**ComXfan:** i hope bendis writes invaders. i love daredevil and ultimate spiderman.

**RichHead:** dark knight is good. manga is crap. anime is poop. and a turd by a different name. . .

**JoMama:** i had an idea for a comic book store that just sold comics.

**RichHead:** bendis used to be good before he sold out.

**JoMama:** and porn.

**ComXfan:** who could draw invaders? they would have to be able to draw cool superheroes and gritty war stuff too.

**EfYu2:** theres not enough porn comics.

**PCPete:** youre an idiot richhead. read nausicaa of the valley of the wind. its better than your stupid dark knight holy grail.

**RichHead:** right. pokemon is better than dark knight. i hear dragonball z is like watchmen but with pointy hair.

**ComXfan:** hello? can anyone tell me about the new invaders?

**GOOGOODOLL:** whats this i hear about brian michael bendis writing dragonball comics? and since when does he live in canada?

# THE B-SIDES

## Wanna know DC's hottest characters? Look no further than the supporting cast!

In 2002 DC proved that a sixth man is just as important as a starter. Take a look at some of DC's hottest titles, and you're bound to see more previously "B-level" characters (such as Hawkman, Green Arrow and Batgirl) taking the place of established ones. Heck, even the JLA added a few benchwarmers like the Atom, Hawkgirl and Jason Blood. Taking a cue from the successful minor leaguers of 2002, here're a few former DC supporting characters who will go from lame to fame in 2003.

### HARLEY QUINN

**THE DEAL:** After studying and falling in love with the Joker at Arkham Asylum, psychiatrist Dr. Harleen Quinzell ditched the lab coat for a red-and-black bustard, face paint and a life of crime as Harley Quinn.

**THE LOW POINT:** Harley reached new lows when, in a storyarc concluded in *Harley Quinn* #21, she found herself in Hell, teaming up with the ever-lame Etrigan the Demon to take on, um, other demons.

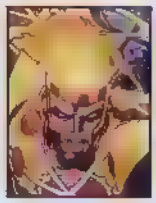
**WHAT'S AHEAD:** Thanks to new creators A.J. Lieberman and penciler Mike Huddleston, Harley's no longer comic relief to "Mista J" and takes on the role of ultra-violent and ever-mysterious anti-hero (see **page 128**). The new Harley's tough-as-nails, having been shot and tossed off a building while remaining strong enough to trade blows with anyone stupid enough to go toe to toe.

### TEEN TITANS

**THE DEAL.** Formed out of corruption and bonded by tragedy, the Teen Titans have seen members come and go, but remain the training camp for young heroes to become pillars of the superhero community.

**THE LOW POINT:** After a revamp a few years back, the action in *Titans* took a backseat to team relations, and the book became its own superhero talk show. Then, in an issue billed as being chock full of surprises, Wonder Girl sits the team down and says, "We need to talk." *Gasahhh!*

**WHAT'S AHEAD:** Simple: Geoff Johns. Proving that he's got the Midas touch when it comes to reviving dead-in-the-water characters (Hawkman, Flash), fans will see that these young heroes have bigger problems than super-criminals when *Teen Titans* revamps this July. Nope, their biggest problems will likely be each other.



### FIRESTORM

**THE DEAL:** After a terrorist attack on a nuclear power plant, Professor Martin Stein and high school student Ronnie Raymond bonded to form the being known as Firestorm, a nuclear man with the ability to chemically transform inorganic matter.

**THE LOW POINT:** Jeez, has Firestorm ever had it *good*? In addition to a series of costumes that would get him beat up by a gang of eighth-graders, the poor guy saw his demise at the hands of the government—who killed him with a nuke!

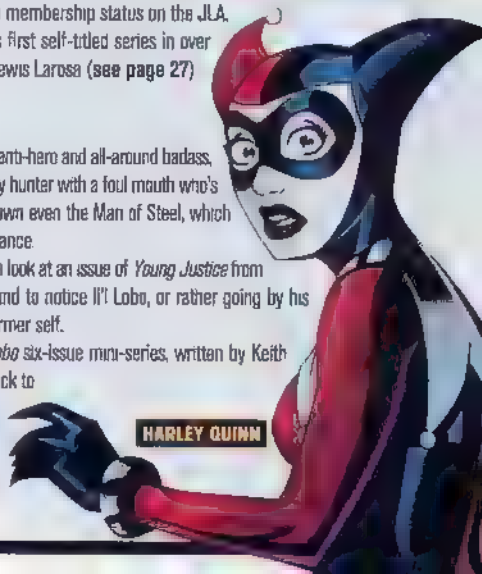
**WHAT'S AHEAD:** Fans have demanded the return of Firestorm since 2001 and DC has responded with a slew of guest appearances, giving Firestorm membership status on the JLA. This summer the Nuclear Man will star in his first self-titled series in over a decade, written by Mike Carey with art by Lewis Larosa (**see page 27**).

### LOBO

**THE DEAL:** DC's original anti-hero and all-around badass, Lobo's an immortal bounty hunter with a foul mouth who's strong enough to take down even the Man of Steel, which he did in his first appearance.

**THE LOW POINT:** Take a look at an issue of *Young Justice* from last year, and you're bound to notice it! Lobo, or rather going by his new name, Slobo, a pint-sized version of his former self.

**WHAT'S AHEAD:** In this summer's all-new *Lobo* six-issue mini-series, written by Keith Giffen with painted art by Alex Horley. Lobo's back to his old self again, guns blazing and grenade tossin'. Not to mention, thanks to Horley's art on the series, it's safe to say that the Bastich is back and looking badder than ever. ■CS



HARLEY QUINN

# WILSON TAKES COVER

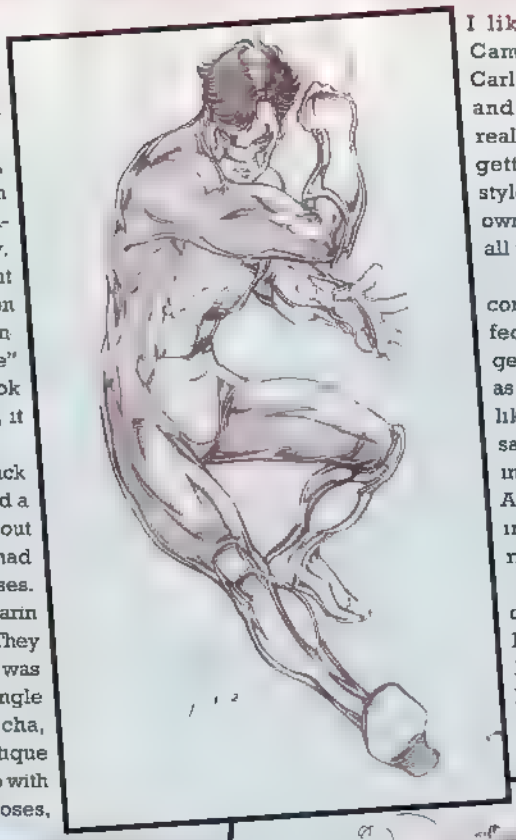
## Say hello to the newest 'Draw WIZARD's Cover Contest' winner!

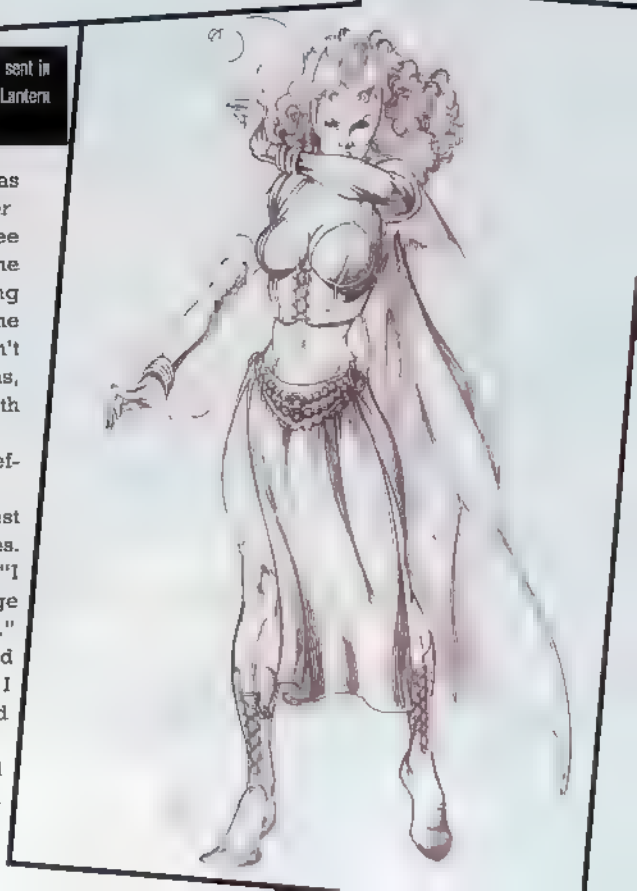
Michael Wilson couldn't believe his ears.

When the 29-year-old printing press employee from Milwaukie, Ore., was told that he had won *Wizard*'s latest cover contest, he immediately suspected foul play.

"When I first got the call, I thought it was one of my friends playing a joke on me!" confessed Wilson. It took some convincing, but he soon realized that the "joke" was actually a dream come true. "It took awhile for it to sink in—but once it did, it was pretty exciting!"

Of course, this wasn't Wilson's first crack at a *Wizard* cover. "Last year, I submitted a couple different drawings, but I went about it totally wrong," admitted Wilson. "I had the wrong characters and the wrong poses. I thought I'd be original, so I drew a Mandarin Spawn cover and a Manga Spawn cover. They turned out okay, but the Mandarin Spawn was only from the waist up and had an odd angle to it, and the Manga Spawn was a mecha, which probably made it difficult to critique the anatomy. So this year, I decided to go with mainstream characters and full body poses, trying to get as original in the poses as possible. And I sent off a dozen or so entries to cover my butt!"





**WIZARD!** Michael Wilson sent in 12 entries, including Green Lantern (top) and Scarlet Witch.

It worked. Wilson's entries stood out above the other 7,700, and with *Wizard*'s instructions—Venom was chosen as the cover boy because of his recent *Ultimate Spider Man* appearance and a brand-new upcoming series (see **page 66**)—the artist began the process of creating the final cover image. "I didn't waste any time getting started!" said Wilson. "As soon as I got the info on the cover, I started working, and I was so into it that it didn't take long to finish. I did a bunch of different variations, and I hashed out the one that we picked to come up with the final version that we used for the cover.

"It was a fun experience, and something I could definitely get into!"

For Wilson, winning the contest was just the latest step in a journey that started with his childhood doodles. "I've been drawing since day one!" said Wilson. "I remember waking up one morning and drawing huge Bert and Ernie faces on my bedroom wall with crayon." Not surprisingly, Wilson's love of drawing went hand in hand with his love for comics. "I used to pretend I was Spider-Man, running around in a red T-shirt and blue pants!"

As for his favorite artists? "I've got lots!" laughed Wilson. "I'm a huge George Pérez fan, and a big John Byrne fan from the old days. In terms of newer artists, I like guys like J. Scott Campbell, Joe Madureira, Carlos Pacheco, Alan Davis and John Cassaday. I like really clean styles, and I'm getting into more abstract styles, so I try to pattern my own style after elements of all those guys."

These days, Wilson is constantly working to perfect his skills. "I'm really getting into drawing people, as well as inanimate objects like cars and buildings," said Wilson. "I love drawing different architecture. And I'm actually getting into computer coloring right now."

Hopefully, all this comes in preparation for his next big break. "As high profile as *Wizard* is, hopefully the cover will catch somebody's eye!"

■ RICHARD HO

# FIRSTLOOK

## DOC FRANKENSTEIN

### 'Matrix' buddies Steve Skroce and Geof Darrow pair up to bring Frankenstein's Monster back to life

Frankenstein's Monster already rose from the dead once. Now he'll rise again, at the hand of two creators making a return of their own.

Geof Darrow and Steve Skroce will unleash their monstrous talents on *Doc Frankenstein*, the further adventures of Frankenstein's Monster. The collaborators have been largely out of comics for years, working as design and storyboard artists for the "Matrix" movies. They're now pulled from "Bullet Time" and high-flyin' sci-fi by an unholy attraction from beyond the grave.

"I *love* the original book," Skroce says of Mary Shelley's classic *Frankenstein* novel. "In every incarnation, everyone's had their own spin. Now you'll see ours."

Skroce and Darrow are not going for a bolt-necked, Boris Karloff-looking monster, though. They're sticking to the original concept: a monster that was super-strong, very fast and highly intelligent—the kind of qualities that could make for a great action hero. And that's just what he is in *Doc Frankenstein: Unholy Nemesis of Evil*, a four-issue mini-series co-plotted by the duo. Skroce will script, pencil and ink the book, then find a publisher, hopefully to get the first issue out by fall 2003. Skroce already has shopped the property to every major comic publisher, including DC, Marvel, Top Cow and Dark Horse. He already has the first issue completely done, but work has been put on hold temporarily while Skroce completes his design work for the upcoming "I, Robot" feature film.

"Geof is the inspiration. It's all from his ideas," Skroce says. "The concept is that when the monster wandered off at the end of the novel, he *didn't* die. He's traveled the world, lived for hundreds of years and amassed a fortune. He has this Old West history and he was a World War II hero. He's become this super-influence in the world, protecting the dispossessed. Because of his origins, he understands and has sympathy for those cut loose from society."

The story takes place in the modern day, with the Frankenstein family "outing" him for what he is—a patchwork abomination pieced together from corpses. "His very existence then creates a discourse on the nature of humanity, creation and God," Skroce says. "Many people are uncomfortable with the fact that he even exists."

The revelation of his existence leads to attacks on Doc's stronghold in the Nevada desert, tons of action and a future that could morph into a series of mini-series.

"There's just so much meat there, *tons* of potential," Skroce says. "He's good for all different types of action-adventure stories. Hopefully, we can do it long-term. I'm definitely up for it."

*All Wayne Comer is up for is a three-to-five stretch in the pokey. Something about an underage donkey*

BY WAYNE COMER

### MONSTER DOCTOR

**THE DILLY-O**

Frankenstein's Monster *didn't* die at the end of the Mary Shelley novel. In Steve Skroce and Geof Darrow's take, he lived on, using his great strength, speed and near-immortality to become one of the world's greatest heroes.

**WHY YOU CARE**

Not only is the concept (Hellboy meets League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, it's done by mega-talents Skroce and Darrow, who designed "The Matrix." Darrow wowed audiences with *Big Guy and Rusty the Boy Robot*, while fans still talk about Skroce's hyper-kinetic art on *Amazing Spider-Man* and *Wolverine*.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

*Doc Frankenstein* has been on Darrow's drawing board for over *four years*! With Skroce and Darrow spending months at a time on location in Vancouver, California and Australia working on "The Matrix" sequels, it's only now that Frankenstein can come back to life. And Skroce and Darrow didn't even need a lightning bolt to do it! ■ WC

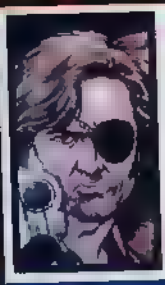
# LAST MAN STANDING

comic battles you never thought you'd see

## SNAKE PLISSKEN VS. ASH

### THE COMBATANTS

TALE OF THE TAPE



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 5'8" | HEIGHT | 5'7" |
| 165lbs | WEIGHT | 170lbs |
| 68" | REACH | 67" |
| eye patch | DISTINGUISHING ANOMALY | pro-truding chin |
| leather jacket | FAVORITE ACCESSORY | chain-saw |

**Origins...** S.D. "Snake" Plissken was a lieutenant in the U.S. Special Forces, but after robbing the Federal Reserve Depository, Snake was caught and sentenced to life imprisonment in maximum security prison.

Ash toiled in the "Housewares" department of his local S-Mart, until the fateful day he traveled to a remote cabin in the woods and discovered the *Necronomicon*, a book containing unspeakable evil that Ash accidentally unleashed on the world!

**The battle...** Thanks to the *Necronomicon*, Ash finds himself in a dimension where Manhattan's a maximum-security prison and L.A. has sunk into the ocean! While getting his bearings, Ash runs into Snake Plissken, an outlaw with a short temper and a quick trigger finger. When Ash asks for help, Snake's only reply is to pistolwhip the poor guy! Rising to defend himself, Ash reaches for his shotgun, but quickly finds it smashed out of his hands by Snake, who wields a Louisville Slugger imbedded with roofing nails! Ducking under Snake's second home run swing, Ash fires up the chainsaw on his right hand and reduces Snake's bat to sawdust. However, the saw reacts badly with the nails, which bombard Ash like a face full of shrapnel. Snake decides he's done toying with this clown and looks to fill Ash full of lead with his MAC-10 machine pistol, but before he can get a shot off, an interdimensional portal opens up behind Ash -and dozens of demonic mini Ashes spring forth to bedevil *both* combatants! While trying to fight off the horde, Ash winds up accidentally clubbing Snake several times about the head with his shotgun, causing the outlaw to retreat and save his own neck. While Ash turns his attention—and his weapons—to dispatching the army of tiny terrors, Snake hops on his motorcycle and makes for a quick getaway. "Hey, mister, can you help me out?" asks Ash, as swarms of mini-Ashes begin to cover his body. "Go f— yourself, pal," scowls the one-eyed outlaw. "And the name is Snake!"

this month's battle drawn by TONE RODRIGUEZ & MARLO ALQUIZA

# TWO for ONE

## Mike Turner and friends invite you to choose which project he takes on next

Just like MTV, superstar artist Mike Turner wants you to rock the vote.

Turner, who announced last month that he'd departed Top Cow Productions and moved his top-selling *Fathom* series and two new projects to form Aspen Entertainment, plans to begin one of the new series by summer 2003. *Batman* writer Jeph Loeb has signed on to write Turner's *Dragonfly*; *Soulfire* and Geoff Johns (*JSA*, *Avengers*) has signed on to write the artist's other new project, *Ekos*. But Turner admits he's torn on which book to launch first—that's where his fans come in.

"I liked each idea so much that I wanted to do both," explains Turner. "The best way to decide which project to do first was give the fans the choice—let them decide my fate."

How do you pitch in? After reading each preview on the following 12 pages, go to **www.wizarduniverse.com** and vote on which series you'd like to see Turner crank out soonest. Or just fill out the mail-in ballot found inside this issue's polybag.

While neither of the writers or Turner want to hazard a guess as to which new series will win over *Wizard* fans, everyone agrees the projects are nothing like each other or Turner's previous work on *Fathom* and *Witchblade*.

"*Ekos* takes place on a world that's evolved into a segregated society, where everyone lives their lives their own separate ways," reveals Johns. "But the world unites when there's an alien invasion. The series focuses on Grel, who is labeled a doomsayer because he's seen a vision of this invasion."

Loeb plays to one of Turner's greatest strengths—drawing the hottest women this side of *Playboy*.

"It's about 'a' future and the nature of magicks, how we treat each other and what could happen if we continue down our current path," explains Loeb.

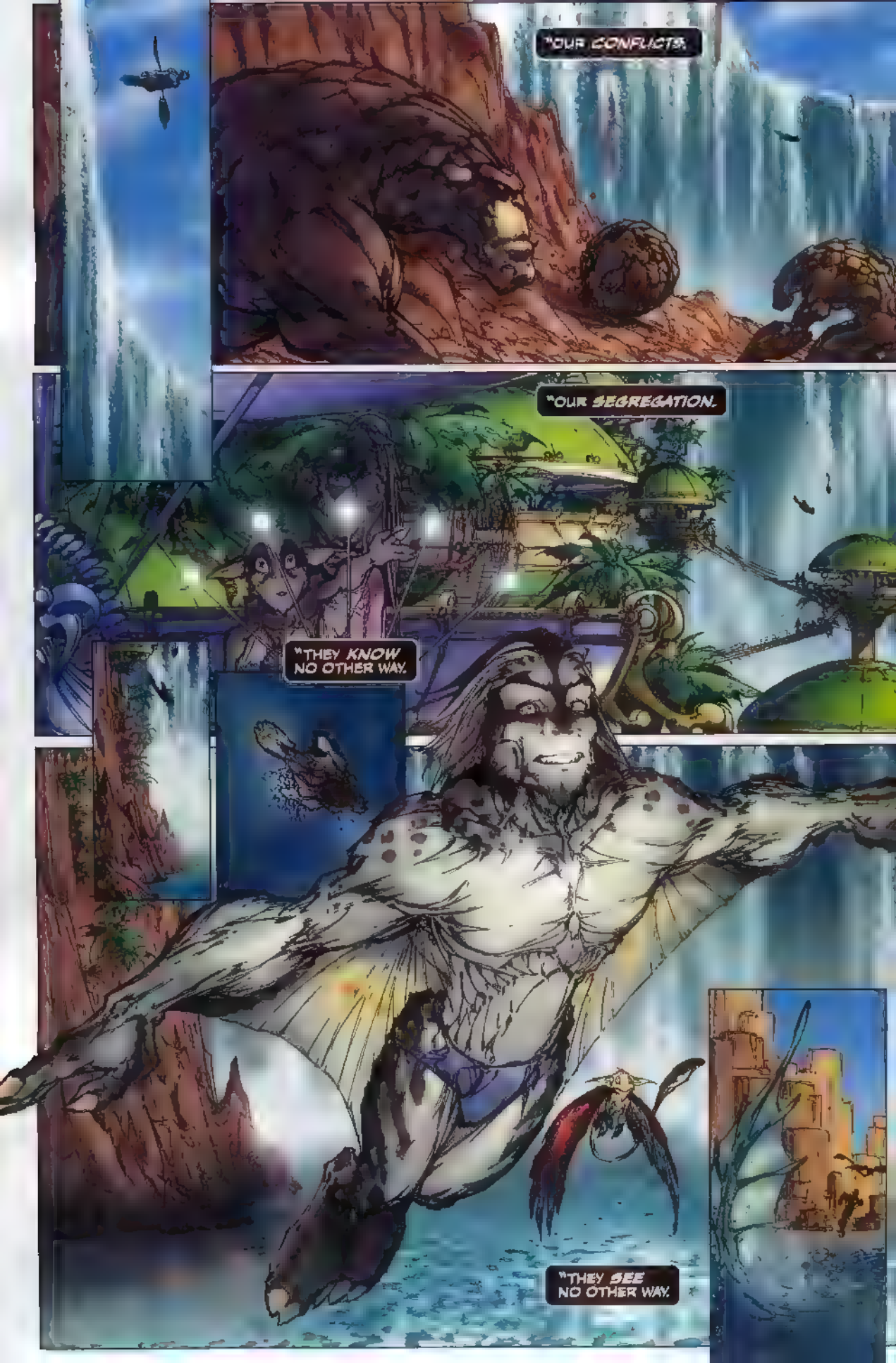
Turner admits it'll be a close race to the finish line, but no matter the outcome, fans can expect both series to eventually be produced. Far from a fast artist, Turner says he'll be investing a lot of time in getting these series out on a monthly basis—even if that means getting issues done far in advance.

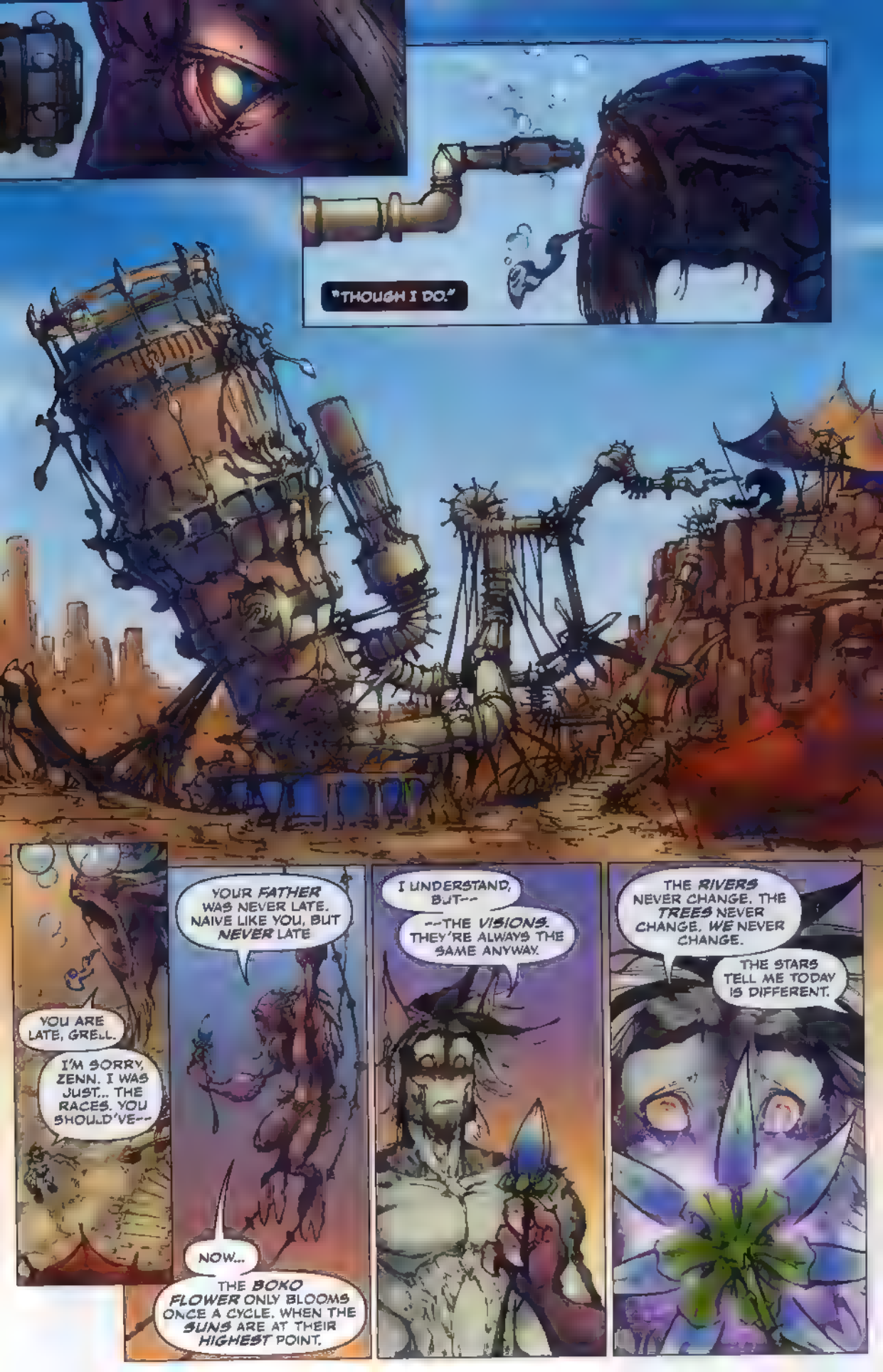
"I'll get a few issues done before we ever solicit them," says Turner. "I don't have a set number of issues yet for either series. Each will be at least six issues, but probably more like eight. If I get to issue #8 and I still have some story to tell, it'll be 10 issues."

So what are you waiting for? Hunker down and read through the next 12 pages, vote at **wizarduniverse.com** and give us your comments at **AspenVote@aol.com**! Then come back to find out which series wins in *Wizard* #142, on sale in comic stores May 28, on sale everywhere June 10!

**By Mike Cotton**

"Ekos.
REATOR: MICHAEL TURNER
TORYTELLERS: GEOFF JOHNS
MICHAEL TURNER
RT: MICHAEL TURNER
OLOR: PETER STEIGERWALD
TTERS: DREAMER DESIGN
"SINCE IT HAS EXISTED—
—IT HAS NEVER CHANGED.
"NO ONE HERE WANTS IT TO."


"OUR CONFLICTS.
"OUR SEGREGATION.
"THEY KNOW NO OTHER WAY.
"THEY SEE NO OTHER WAY.


"THOUGH I DO."
YOU ARE LATE, GRELL.
I'M SORRY, ZENN. I WAS JUST... THE RACES. YOU SHOULD'VE--
YOUR FATHER WAS NEVER LATE. NAIVE LIKE YOU, BUT NEVER LATE
NOW...
THE BOKO FLOWER ONLY BLOOMS ONCE A CYCLE. WHEN THE SUNS ARE AT THEIR HIGHEST POINT.
I UNDERSTAND, BUT--
--THE VISIONS. THEY'RE ALWAYS THE SAME ANYWAY.
THE RIVERS NEVER CHANGE. THE TREES NEVER CHANGE. WE NEVER CHANGE.
THE STARS TELL ME TODAY IS DIFFERENT.

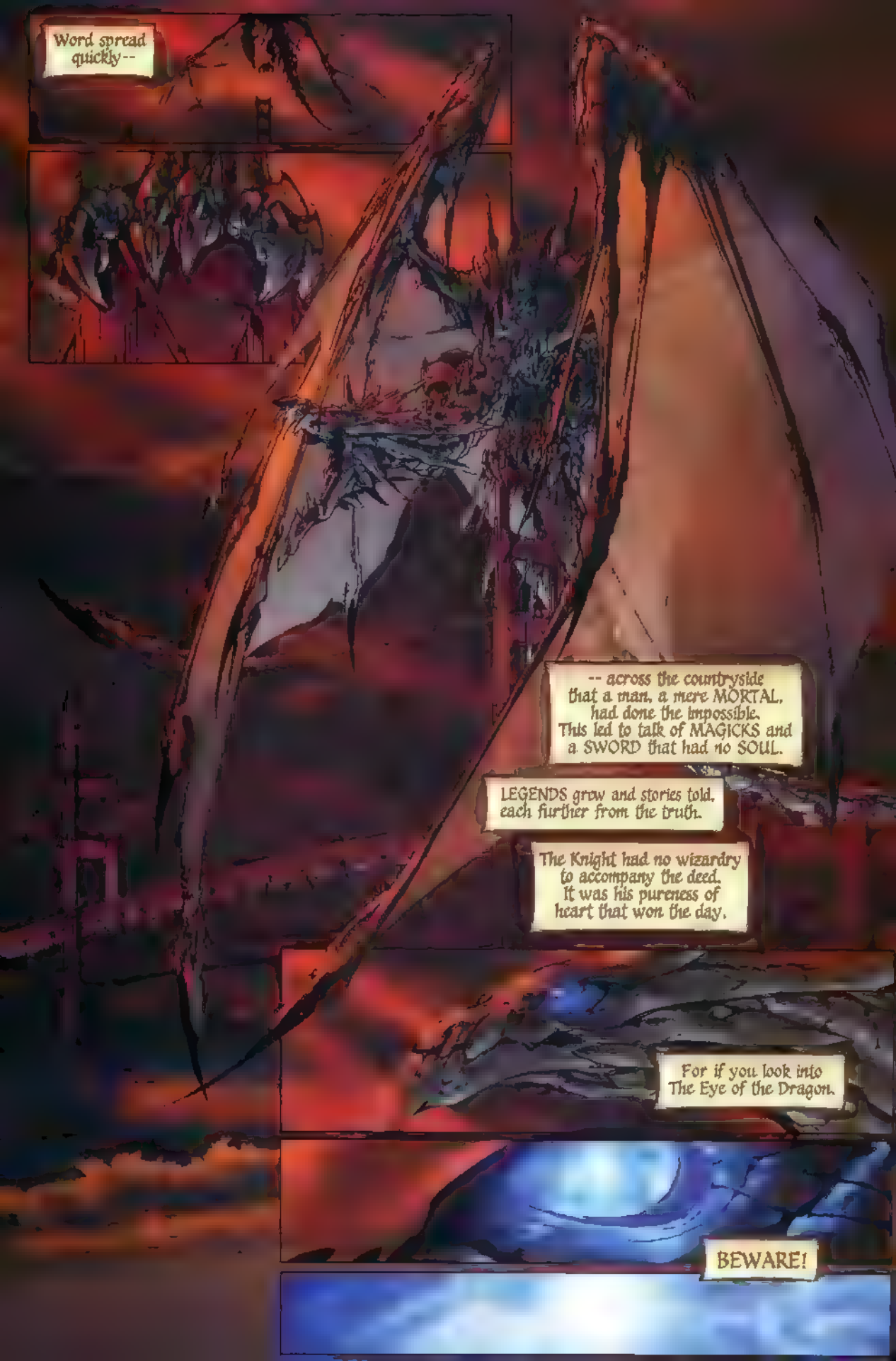
"AS IS TOMORROW."

WHAT IS--
--I HAVE TO GO. I HAVE TO WARN THEM!
GO THEN.
TELL THEM THEIR WORLD IS ABOUT TO CHANGE.
...
BUT NO ONE WILL LISTEN.
THE BEGINNING.

Until,
at last,
there came a KNIGHT
who drew his GOLDEN sword and plunged it into the belly of the great beast.
Until, at last, there came a KNIGHT who drew his GOLDEN sword and plunged it into the belly of the great beast. And FIRE spilled forth as if a mighty blast furnace had been split in two.
Though the Knight was LOST, he had done the deed no other had.
A great SHADOW had been lifted from the land.

These were the days of
DRAGONS
Winged creatures which flew about the countryside and spewed forth fire with the stench of brimstone.
They were stronger than any man. Their appetite for destruction knew no bounds.

Untamed, it was thought they would rule the lands until the end of time.


Word spread quickly--
-- across the countryside that a man, a mere MORTAL, had done the impossible. This led to talk of MAGICKS and a SWORD that had no SOUL.
LEGENDS grow and stories told, each further from the truth.
The Knight had no wizardry to accompany the deed. It was his pureness of heart that won the day.
For if you look into The Eye of the Dragon.
BEWARE!

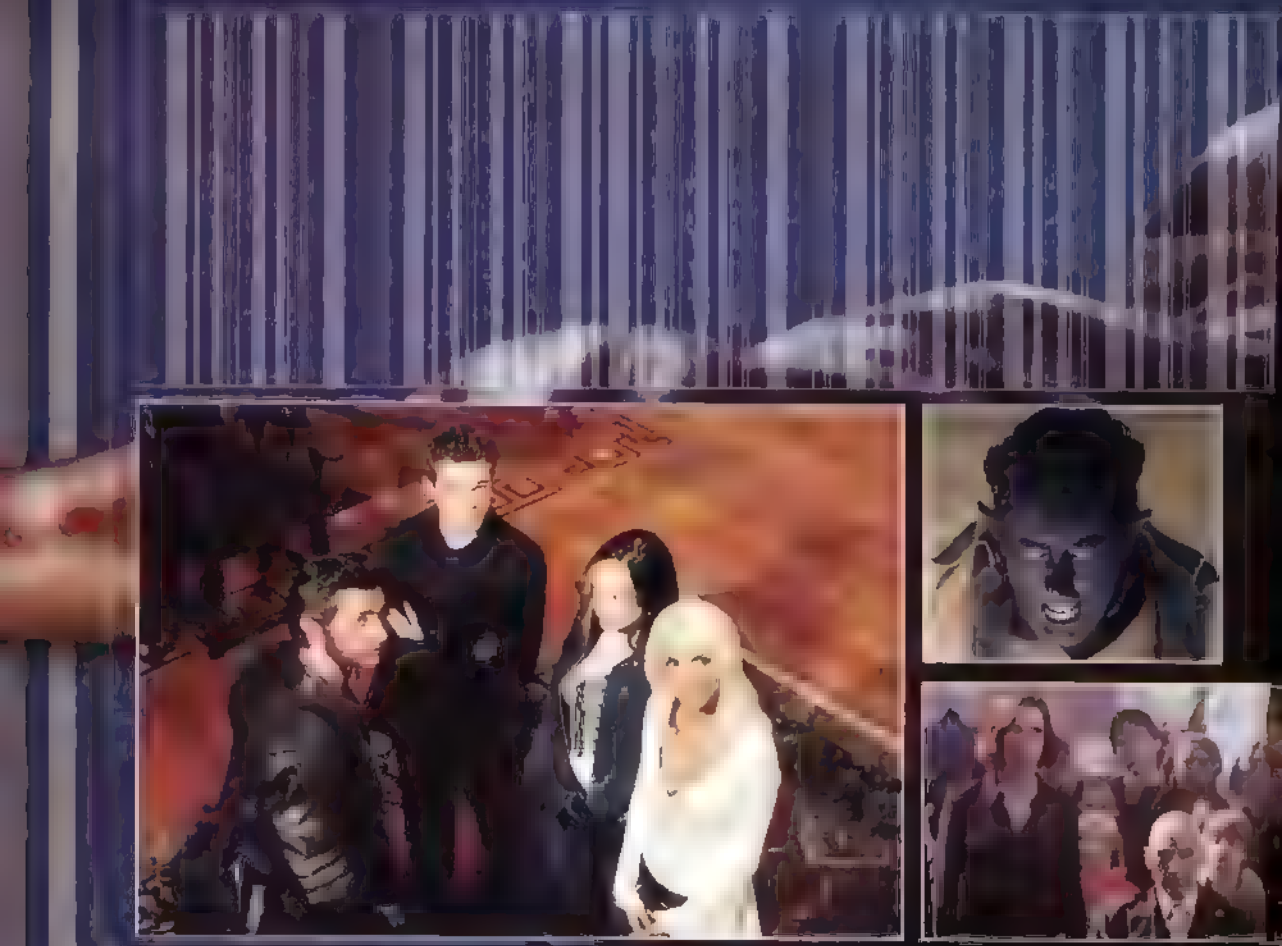
Lest, the Dragon look back into thee.
MALIKAL?
DOES IT STILL HURT?
IT DOES.
THAT'S TO BE EXPECTED.
THEN, WHY DID YOU ASK?
GRACE...?
THEY SAID YOU WERE... GONE.
PEOPLE WILL SAY WHAT THEY THEMSELVES WANT TO HEAR.
IT'S UP TO YOU WHETHER OR NOT TO LISTEN.

COME WITH ME, MAL.
WE HAVE MUCH TO DISCUSS...
...AND PRECIOUS LITTLE TIME TO DO IT IN...
"Wings"
Jason Loo &
Richard Turner
Richard Turner
THE BEGINNING...
VOTE now on wizarduniverse.com
or mail in the ballot right away!

# ICE TO KNOW YOU

Meet *X-Men 2* co-star SHAWN ASHMORE who plays sub-zero hero Iceman, as he recounts his on-set adventures including a Smurf attack, cruising in the X-Jet and... *gulp!* Wolverine's sister!

**BY SHAWN ASHMORE**



## WEDNESDAY, MAY 15, 2002

I don't know if I quite believe it myself, but I've just been told that I'm going to Vancouver for five months to play Bobby Drake/Iceman in the sequel to "X-Men." Although I played the part in the first film, it was definitely a smaller role (that quite possibly could have been passed by for a new mutant at the school) I guess they saw a relationship between Rogue [played by Anna Paquin] and Bobby that might be interesting to expand on.

Listen, I'm not going to ask questions! I'm just going to go along for the ride and see what happens. If it's anything like the first film, it should be a very exciting summer for me. And if the first draft of the script gives any indication, there's a lot of action in store for all of us!

I can't wait to freeze something!

## MONDAY, JUNE 10, 2002

After a lot of packing and anticipation, I've finally arrived in Vancouver. Today's the day the whole cast gets together for a full read-through of the script.

I've got to say, I'm a little bit nervous about the whole thing. Not only are all the producers and executives from 20th Century Fox and Marvel Films going to be there, but the majority of the cast as well. Don't get me wrong; everybody has been completely welcoming, but at the end of the day, read-throughs are my least favorite part about starting a new project. It's basically a bunch of actors that don't know their lines reading the script while other people watch. Weird huh?

I have to admit that once we all started to read together, there was definitely a feeling of excitement in the room. I think it went off without a hitch!

I've also met some great people in the last couple of days. Yesterday at the makeup and wardrobe tests, I was introduced to Aaron Stanford who plays Pyro. He seems like a cool guy and I'm sure we'll get along really well. He's even newer to the X-Men experience than I am, which makes me feel better. It's interesting that our characters are so different and volatile in the film and yet we get along great. I'm not going to argue, sometimes you get lucky and work with people you like and respect.

It was great to see Anna again as I spent most of my time hanging out with her on the first movie. After the read-through, [director] Bryan Singer has invited us on a tour of the new sets. From what I've heard, this includes the White House, Cerebro and a new version of Magneto's plastic prison. I've also heard rumors of a new and improved X-Jet that is going to get some serious airtime in this movie.

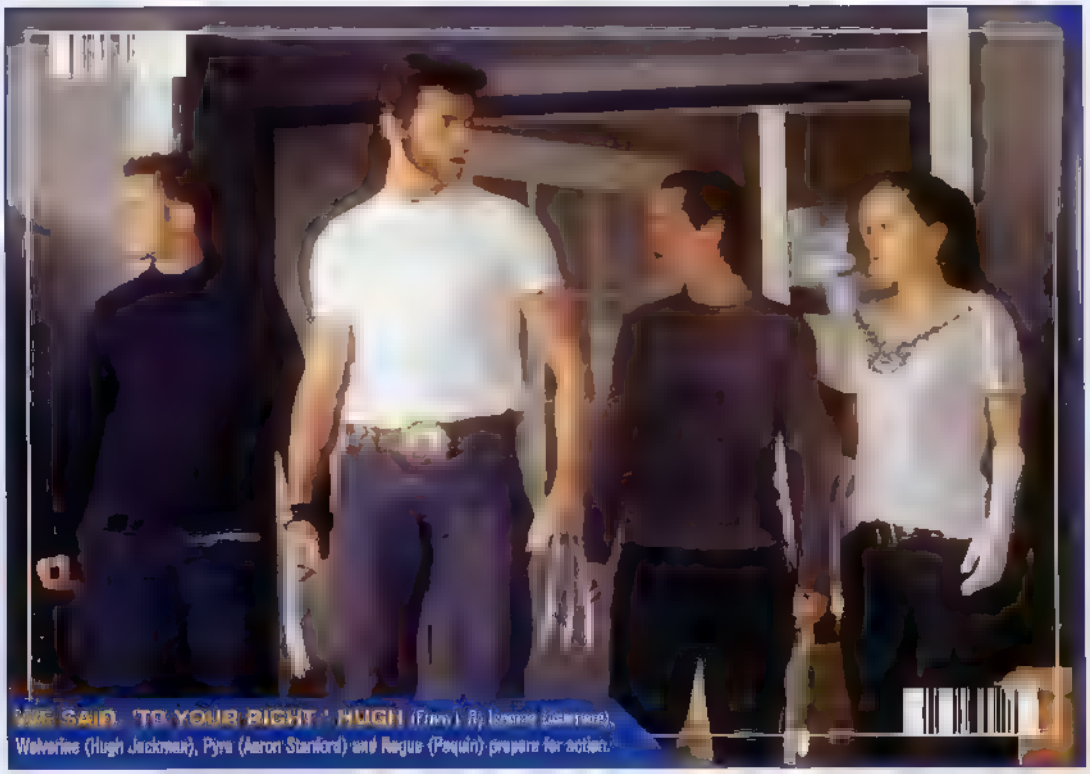
## THURSDAY, JUNE 20, 2002

My first day of shooting has finally come and it's pretty much what I expected. Call time was bright and early after the small party that was thrown last night in honor of the first day of shooting. After a quick shower and a last-minute review of the day's scene, I shook off my nerves and ran downstairs to catch my ride (I always get nervous before the first day, especially when I'm working with such established actors).

We are shooting in an identical version of the X-Mansion used in the first film. The only difference is that this time we are filming on Vancouver Island off the west coast of Canada as opposed to Toronto. It's only a few thousand miles away! It feels quite appropriate for me to spend my first couple of days filming mansion scenes considering I spent the majority of my screen time in the last movie wandering the halls of the school.

Our first scene is sort of a reunion between the X-Men characters, which establishes everyone's relationship to one another, sort of like a recap for all those who have forgotten since the last movie. It's really cool to see the whole group

**WHAT NUMBER AM I THINKING?**
Ashmore and Anna Paquin (Rogue) share a quiet moment.



**WE SAID, 'TO YOUR RIGHT.' HUGH** (Finn) [illegible], Wolverine (Hugh Jackman), Pyro (Aaron Stanford) and Rogue (Paquin) prepare for action.

together again for the first time. I feel like everybody slipped back into his or her characters really easily considering it's been close to two and a half years since everyone last put on their X-suits and saved the world.

I think the highlight of the day for me was introducing myself as Iceman to Logan in that opening scene. It made me feel like little Bobby Drake was all grown up and ready to kick some ass! It's always the little things that make me happy and so far I've had a smile on my face that doesn't seem like it's going anywhere.

## WEDNESDAY, JULY 10, 2002

O.K., here's the day I've really been waiting for: the first time in the film I get to use my powers!

I don't get to hurt any bad guys today but just the fact that my mutant abilities are being displayed is pretty exciting! This is also one of the first days that we haven't been filming in a remote location or the studio. We're filming in a neighborhood just outside Vancouver in a town called Surrey.

I'm beginning to see how excited people are for the sequel. As of crew call this morning, the Surrey neighbors have been getting out lawn chairs to watch us work. When there's a break, everyone comes and hangs out like we're having a block party! It's really interesting to see Bryan Singer talk to the fans about the new film. He's a director who doesn't mind taking the time to talk to people that are interested in the movie. I think that's great because the only reason sequels get made is because of the fans' support of the first movie. It's really nice to be received in a positive way even though we're taking over their street for a week. I'm sure this is going to be a great couple of days and I'm sure there's a lot of cool stuff to come.

One month down, five more to go!

## MONDAY, AUGUST 12, 2002

It seems to me that there's nothing tougher looking than a bunch of X-Men in black leather outfits. That might sound like I'm joking but I'm really dead serious. We spent the day in the Oval Office, which is essentially an exact replica of the real thing. Guy Dyas, the production designer, has created some incredibly elaborate sets for this film. The detail in the Oval Office goes right from the rugs on the floors to art on the walls. It almost makes you feel like the real President might walk in and kick you out of his office! Luckily it's under our control, so we can bring a bunch of leather-clad mutants in there and no one can do a thing about it! Ah, the magic of film!

## SUNDAY, AUGUST 18, 2002

There's one thing that always amazes me no matter how many times I see it and that's Mystique's and Nightcrawler's makeup. Rebecca [Romijn-Stamos] and Alan [Cumming] have to walk around all day in blue makeup. Kyle, their assistant, came up with the original nickname the Smurfs! Pretty appropriate, don't you think? The makeup effects are so real that when you stand next to them you almost feel uncomfortable. However, it is kind of funny when Nightcrawler smiles and asks you, with a strong Scottish accent, if you want to watch "Waiting for Guffman" in his trailer with some of the other cast members while they prep the next scene! It's great though, there's something very unnatural about their characters that really translates to film. I think it also gives the others actors a real sense of uneasiness to play off.

Today is the first day that I'm in a scene with them. We're shooting on a sound stage today, so you really get a chance to check them out. I've been told that both actors spend at

**COOL AS ICE** Ashmore's role will be expanded for "X-Men 2."

least three hours in the makeup chair every day they're on camera. I really admire their patience; I'm just thankful nobody has to paint *me* blue!

## MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2002

After a bit of a break from shooting, we're back at the sound stages of the Vancouver Film Studios where most of the sets for "X2" are located.

We've spent the last couple of days being thrown around on a gimble made to look like the X-Jet. It sounds like a lot of fun until the tenth take, when you start to feel seasick! It's like being on a roller coaster that you can't get off. The only saving grace is that everybody is in the same boat, literally! Hugh [Jackman], Patrick [Stewart], Halle [Berry], Famke [Janssen], Jimmy [James Marsden], Alan, Anna, Aaron and I are scheduled to spend the next week flying around. I think these scenes may end up being some of the most exciting stuff in the movie. I'd like to tell you more but I don't want to give away the ending!

## MONDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2002

This is a special entry for me because today is my birthday. Most of the cast is filming all day, so two of my new friends, [screenwriters] Mike Dougherty and Dan Harris, invited me to join them to watch some scenes that have been cut together. It wasn't a wild party but it was kind of a cool way to spend my birthday. Sometimes you almost forget why you're away from home, so it was really great to sit back and appreciate the cool project that I'm working on. I almost fell off the couch when I saw Nightcrawler for the first time [on-screen with special effects added] and I think Wolverine is cooler than ever in this movie. I feel really good about all the footage I've seen and am excited to see more!

## FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2002

Today we had an online press conference for a ton of reporters at our studio. It was pretty interesting because they showed the trailer on a big screen and then introduced all the actors to the audience waiting to get some sort of scoop from Bryan and the cast. I've never done anything like this before, so I took my cues off everybody else. The scary part was that I was the first person to walk on stage and was positive I would trip or embarrass myself in some way. Luckily I held my composure and didn't do anything too embarrassing (a little mumbling maybe).

My favorite part was telling the story of how Hugh's sister came to the set and got dressed up in full Wolverine makeup. I'm talking about hair, makeup, wardrobe and even his giant sideburns! She then went to the set and replaced Hugh for a take to fool Bryan. The best part about it is that he didn't even realize it was her until the end of the take because they looked so similar!

The conference was also funny because we were being asked questions that we weren't allowed to answer. We'd all look at each other and then to Bryan and just sort of laugh and say something like "I can't talk about that because it would ruin the surprise," or "You'll just have to wait and see." They must have thought we were being difficult but we really aren't allowed to give away much of the story. We even have to wear hooded robes around sometimes when we shoot on location to hide our wardrobe. You never know when somebody will have a camera and snap a shot that might let the cat out of the bag. It's kind of fun being in on a secret. You feel like a spy, only we're not really saving the world, we're just pretending to.

## TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2002

The final week of shooting has finally arrived. My last day was actually three days ago at the sound stages. We wrapped after a really great stunt that Anna had been training to do for months. It's always a bit tense when an actor has to do a stunt instead of a trained stunt person, but Anna pulled it off amazingly, being the trooper that she is! Being pulled around in a harness is no easy task! What a great way to finish the shoot!

Anyway, that leads me to explaining why I'm now in the Rocky Mountains of Alberta. Even though I wrapped last week, they still brought me out here to hang out with everyone for the last section of shooting. That's the kind of set I was lucky enough to work on. After six months of working with people so closely, it's a bit hard to say goodbye. Of course, it'll be nice to be home, but the X-perience (no pun intended) is one I will never forget!

I'm sure that everyone's hard work is going to show on screen. The team of talented filmmakers that put this whole production together should be proud that an exciting movie will come from their vision. Well, I guess this is the end. Now I can look forward to seeing everyone, and the movie, when it premieres May 2!

*Special thanks to Shawn Ashmore for keeping this diary for [illegible] May*

M
W

By Richard Ho

# MAKING WAVES

## Marvel rides the tide of manga fever with 11 new launches set to storm the market

# WAVE 1 (APRIL)

## VENOM

**THE TALENT:** Writer Daniel Way, artist Francisco Herrera

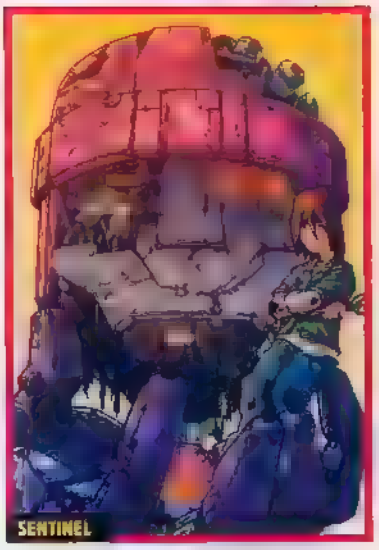
**THE SCOOP:** Everyone's favorite alien symbiote gets the solo treatment in this edgy new series, and fans can expect only one thing—the unexpected.

"We're approaching Venom differently," explains writer Way (*Wolverine*). "The big challenge of this book is, how do you do a Venom book without having Spider-Man in it? Plus, in my opinion, Eddie Brock is a sh— character, as far as motivation goes. I mean, what's his motivation? Unemployment. Now, Venom the alien, *that's* the great character, because we don't even know what his motivation is."

The story finds Venom stirring up trouble near the Arctic Circle, with several mysterious pursuers on his tail. Way's aiming for a dark, suspenseful tone, along the lines of sci-fi/horror movies like "Alien" or "The Thing."

"Those movies were effective because they kept the scary bad guy out of the frame," explains Way. "When you see him, you know something bad's going to happen. So you're not going to see Venom just walking down the street, telling jokes and eating a hot dog."

**MANGA FACTOR:** While artist Francisco Herrera (*Peter Parker: Spider-Man*) doesn't boast a truly manga style, his offbeat pencils certainly call to mind other manga-influenced artists like Humberto Ramos. "Francisco definitely has a very overblown kind of style, where everything is kind of cartoony," says Way. "And he's really dynamic as far as movement, pacing and layout."




## SENTINEL

**THE TALENT:** Writer Sean McKeever, artist UDON Studios

**THE SCOOP:** Every kid needs a best friend—but what happens when your best friend is a 30-foot tall giant robot? Writer Sean McKeever (*Waiting Place*) explores that very question in *Sentinel*, a new series introducing Juston Seyfert, a high school sophomore who finds a trashed Sentinel in his family's salvage yard and rebuilds it. "It's really a teen drama, with some really fun fantasy aspects mixed in," says McKeever. "This first storyarc deals with Juston having to make up his mind about what he wants to do with the Sentinel. Living amidst a life of virtual poverty, being picked on by a lot of kids, you can just imagine the sort of things he'd want to do with it! Does he go the whole nine yards, or does he do the right thing?"

Despite the constant presence of a Sentinel as one of the main characters, don't expect the X-Men to show up anytime soon. "*Sentinel* isn't going to be an X-Men spin-off in any real sense," notes the writer. "The book takes place in the Midwest, in Wisconsin, really pretty remote from all the goings-on of the Marvel Universe. But who knows? Down the line, we may look at it and go, 'Wouldn't it be fun if some third-string mutant that nobody's seen in 10 years shows up?'"

**MANGA FACTOR:** Come on, it's a huge honkin' robot! The mechanical star of *Sentinel* definitely brings to mind the iconic mecha of traditional Japanese anime. Combine that with the Japanese-inclined stylings of UDON Studios' artists, and it's pretty clear that *Sentinel* is a perfect fit for Tsunami.

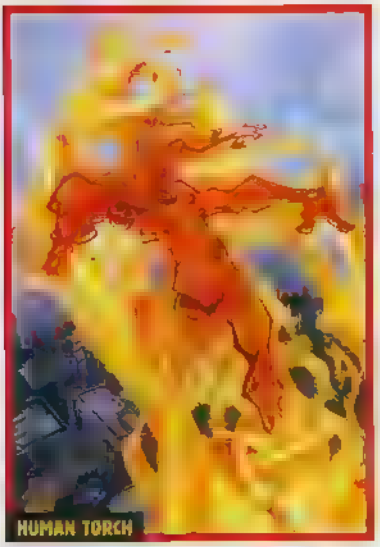
"The teen drama sort of stuff that I'm known for lends itself really well to manga influences," says McKeever. "The pacing I use is a bit more decompressed—it's a bit more emotion specific rather than action specific—and I think manga does that really well, the quiet moments and everything else. So I think it's going to make for a really good mix."

## NAMOR

**THE TALENT:** Writers Bill Jemas and Andi Watson, artist Mizuki Sakakibara

**THE SCOOP:** Ever wonder what the Prince of Atlantis was like as a kid? This fresh take on the classic character will answer that question and more. "We've never really focused on Namor's youth," explains Quesada. "Every time we've launched *Namor*, we've done it in modern-day continuity. This will be more of a look back at Namor, pre-World War II." The young Namor is forced to reconcile his dreams of life on land with his legacy as the prince of an underwater empire—and things get even more complicated when he falls in love! Plus, *Namor* #1 will only cost 25 cents!

**MANGA FACTOR:** The majestic underwater cityscapes of Atlantis are in good hands with Japanese sensation Mizuki Sakakibara, who makes her American debut on an ongoing title. Recruited by C.B. Cebulski when he was in Japan, Sakakibara has done pin-up and cover work on *X-Men Unlimited*. Her take on Namor brings a fresh perspective to the character. "I've heard that Namor's a playboy, so I tried to make him handsome," says Sakakibara. "I also wanted to make his costume look kind of tribal, with lots of jewelry."




## HUMAN TORCH

**THE TALENT:** Writer Karl Kesel, artist Skottie Young

**THE SCOOP:** The Fantastic Four's resident hothead gets a whole lot hotter in this brand new solo series as writer Karl Kesel (*Superboy*) brings Johnny Storm back to his fiery roots. "He's going to have much more of a temper than he's had in the past," says Kesel. "As obvious as it sounds, he's going to be much more fire-like. We're really going to emphasize the danger of being Johnny Storm, much more than I think has been done in years—if ever!"

Although the series is set in the present day, the first issue will flash back to the early days of the Human Torch. "We're going to establish that Johnny, at this point, wanted to be a lot cooler than he really was," laughs Kesel. "We also introduce a character named Mike Snow, who's a high school rival of Johnny's—torch, snow—it's not an accident!" laughs Kesel. "In fact, the first issue documents their growing rivalry and leads up to a pretty shocking ending. From there, we cut to present day, where Mike Snow enters Johnny's life again."

**MANGA FACTOR:** Skottie Young first turned heads with his unique yet dynamic graffiti style on *Spider-Man: Legend of the Spider Clan*—and though he balks at categorizing his style as manga, his kinetic version of the Torch is sure to thrill manga and non-manga fans alike.

# WAVE 2 (MAY)

## WOLVERINE: SNIKT!

**THE TALENT:** Writer/artist Tsutomu Nihei

**THE SCOOP:** Action, action, action. That's what readers are gonna get in this no-holds-barred six-issue mini-series which strips the deadly X-Man down to his primal essence.

"We're taking Wolverine and putting him in a situation where he hasn't been for a while," says Cebulski. "Recent stories in *Uncanny X-Men* and *New X-Men* haven't really shown the more savage, feral side of Wolverine. We're going to get back in touch with the beast within."

The story follows Wolvie's deteriorating humanity as he battles his way through parasitic monsters in a barren wasteland. "We're kind of taking it a bit offworld," says Cebulski. "It's going to be a Wolverine-fighting-aliens kind of thing, which lets us cut a little more loose with the violence!" Expect berserker rages galore!

**MANGA FACTOR:** Logan's always had strong ties to the land of the rising sun, so it's only fitting for *Snikt!* to be written and drawn by one of the most highly regarded manga creators in Japan. Enter Tsutomu Nihei, the creator behind the acclaimed manga series *Blame!* For Nihei, the chance to work on Wolverine was a dream come true. "When Marvel offered me the chance to work for them, they asked me which character I wanted to draw," reveals Nihei. "I told them Wolverine in a second—he's my favorite character in American comics!"

According to Cebulski, *Snikt!* is the perfect match for Nihei's dynamic style. "*Snikt!* is letting Nihei do what he does best, which is action," says the editor. "Of course there's going to be character development

## MYSTIQUE

**THE TALENT:** Writer Brian K. Vaughan, artist Jorge Lucas

**THE SCOOP:** Move over, Jennifer Garner. *Mystique* takes sexy espionage thrillers to a whole new level.

"There's really not a good espionage book out there," explains writer Brian K. Vaughan (*Y—The Last Man*). "something like James Bond or 'Alias' or 'xXx,' which audiences seem to have an insatiable appetite for. I saw a hole in the world of comics that needed to be filled."

Mystique's ruthless attitude and mutant shape-shifting ability fit perfectly with her new role as a secret agent. "She's basically the 007 of this series," says Vaughan. "Professor Xavier is going to be her M, and Forge is going to be her Q."

The heartless Mystique, working for the good guys? Don't worry, it's all part of Vaughan's master plan. "Recently, whenever we writers have gotten female characters with shady backgrounds—and I've been guilty of this, too—our first instinct is to repair them somehow. You've gotta put them through some sort of gauntlet and make them a hero. But when you get a badass character like the Punisher or Wolverine, part of the appeal is that they're slightly morally ambiguous. So I want to hold onto that with Mystique."

**MANGA FACTOR:** Surprisingly, not much. "Jorge Lucas [*Black Panther*] is super-talented," says Vaughan, "but I wouldn't describe his style as traditional manga. But the nice thing about Jorge is that his art isn't cheesecakey—I really didn't want this to be a gratuitous T&A book, and I'll at least attempt to do something slightly more sophisticated than that."

and certain key plot points we're focusing on, but underneath it all, it's going to be an action-heavy story."

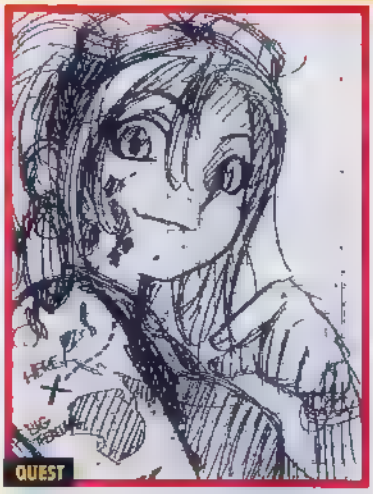
# INHUMANS

**THE TALENT:** Writer Sean McKeever, artist Matthew Clark

**THE SCOOP:** These ain't your father's Inhumans! Sean McKeever's new *Inhumans* series introduces readers to a new generation of the powerful Moon-dwellers. "We're not really taking a look at Black Bolt and Medusa and everybody else," says the scribe. "We're dealing with a group of five young, recently transformed Inhumans. Their king, Black Bolt, essentially sends them to America to study abroad as sort of an exchange student program—which is kind of an odd thing for the Inhumans to want to do!" The reasons for the exchange will be revealed as the series progresses, but in the meantime, the Inhumans have to deal with life on Earth.

"To me, what makes the Inhumans a compelling story is when you throw them up against humans," says McKeever. "Then, you can show the reader exactly why they're called Inhumans, and how they're both like and unlike us."

**MANGA FACTOR:** "I think the character-driven stories are what draws a lot of people to manga in general," admits McKeever. "The same thing is true with *Sentinel*. As long as I'm writing stuff that's more character-driven than it is plot-driven, I'm happy."




# QUEST

**THE TALENT:** Writer Andi Watson, artist Yuji Iwahara

**THE SCOOP:** When it comes to lighthearted treasure-hunting adventure with a supernatural bent, *Quest* marks the spot.

"This book is kind of a departure for Marvel," explains Cebulski, "because it focuses more on the fantasy aspect of manga."

*Quest* follows the adventures of Katherine West, an adventurer's daughter. When her father goes missing, Katherine sniffs out the trail of his last mission, which was to recover a series of ancient scrolls.

"*Quest* features a Harry Potter–like atmosphere of magic and mysticism that we haven't seen in the Marvel

# RUNAWAYS

**THE TALENT:** Writer Brian K. Vaughan, artist Adrian Alphona

**THE SCOOP:** Most kids growing up hate their parents, but the teenage stars of *Runaways* are running from something darker than curfews and revoked driving privileges. "The basic premise is six teenagers who discover the proverbial dark secret about their parents," reveals Vaughan, "and are forced to run away and do something about it."

For Vaughan, the subject of teen angst has often been strangely missing from comics. "I'm inspired by the fact that there are so many comic book characters, like Bruce Wayne or Clark Kent or Peter Parker, who revered adults as kids," explains the scribe. "I like to think that if Bruce Wayne's parents had survived, he probably would have grown up hating them, like most normal teenagers do. *Runaways* is an exploration of that, about kids who, for various reasons, have problems with their parents, and how they work it out."

**MANGA FACTOR:** Yet another talented artist is making his debut, courtesy of the recruiting efforts of Cebulski. "Adrian Alphona is amazing!" gushes Vaughan. "I'm 26, and I know he's younger than I am, which is great—you've got two relatively young guys working on a book about young people. So it's not 60-year-old guys trying to ape kids' language. Plus, he's a naturally gifted storyteller with a fun style, and he's really good at making the kids look like they live in 2003, in the real world."

Universe before," promises Cebulski, "It's different from Doctor Strange or Scarlet Witch. It's a little bit more fun-based magic, a little bit younger—and the boundaries of reality are pushed a little bit farther."

**MANGA FACTOR:** Cute girls, mystical artifacts, gorgeous art—yep, *Quest* has manga written all over it. Artist Yuji Iwahara adds an authentic and highly realistic manga look to the magical mix, as well as providing plots for the books (writer Andi Watson supplies the scripts).

Cebulski oversees the translation of all material from Tsunami's Japanese creators. "It's a fun process," enthuses the editor, "but we have to find a balance between what the manga artists want to do—they often like to run a little bit wild—and playing within the set of rules that we've established for the Marvel Universe."

## CREW

**THE TALENT:** Writer Priest, artist Joe Bennett

**THE SCOOP:** "A Christian, a Muslim and a Jew go into a bar," deadpans writer Priest (*Black Panther*). "Or, better yet, ever see the movie 'Three Kings'? There ya go. That's the overall tone and style of *The Crew*."

The Avengers they ain't. Four mismatched loners put their personal interests aside, banding together to save the denizens of violence-torn Little Mogadishu. The members of the Crew are a motley bunch, armed with personal vendettas and questionable motivations. The roll call includes James "Rhodey" Rhodes (a.k.a. War Machine), who arrives in the Mog seeking vengeance against the drug lords that killed his sister; Kasper Cole, the Black Panther impersonator and Brooklyn narcotics officer looking for a promotion; Junta, the shady former spy who constantly sabotages the Crew's efforts from within; and the new Justice, the son of Isaiah Bradley from *Truth: Red, White & Black*.

"They are not a team," insists Priest. "They have no clubhouse. Swear no oaths. Most of the time, they don't even like each other. But they have a common goal: protect the innocents of the Mog and destroy the evil that has so festered there. They're a kind of dysfunctional, ersatz streetwise Avengers."

**MANGA FACTOR:** Of all the Tsunami books, *The Crew* is probably the least influenced by manga sensibilities. "That's not really us," says Priest. "I suppose you could say we're the one dry patch of land in the midst of the Tsunami."

## NEW MUTANTS

**THE TALENT:** Writers Nunzio DiPilippis and Christina Weir, artist Keron Grant

**THE SCOOP:** As Bobby Drake says in the first X-flick, "Welcome to Mutant High." This latest incarnation of the teen heroes-in-training boasts a new generation of powerful mutants, the return of old favorites and teen angst galore. "It's going to be a re-exploration of Xavier's school," explains co-writer Nunzio DiPilippis. "The old generation was a bunch of kids who were privately tutored by Xavier. Now that it's expanded, with 150 students, it allows us to really show mutants in high school."

Familiar faces like Wolfsbane, Magma and Dani Moonstar will all show up. "The new

teenagers coming to the school will be taught and guided by some of the old New Mutants," adds co-writer Christina Weir. "So we've got a passing of the torch."

Expect to see more character development than superhero action, at least in the beginning. "There's going to be more superheroic storylines, like an actual villain," agrees DiPilippis. "But it's not in Xavier or the previous generation's plans to get the kids in costumes. Right now, they want them to get a normal education."

**MANGA FACTOR:** In addition to the dynamic artwork of Keron Grant (*Kaboom*), *New Mutants* will feature manga sensibilities on the storytelling end. "There's a leisurely pace to the storytelling that we're employing," says DiPilippis "taking our time with the characters and not feeling like we have to hit them with X or Y at a certain point."

*While Tsunami all sounds well and good, Staff Writer Richard Ho just wants to do "The Wave."*

## SHOCKWAVES

**Marvel's bracing for even more waves, with at least three more Tsunami books slated to hit this summer. As of press time, details were as rare as a dry spot in Atlantis—all we got were a handful of book titles.**

**But hey, that's never stopped us before! We thought it might be fun to predict how these books are gonna shake down. Take a peek into our crystal ball...**

**INFINITY** Jim Starlin finally runs out of words to put after "Infinity" and settles for an ongoing instead. All of existence is destroyed and reborn...in each and every issue. In the first arc, Thanos tries his hand at stand-up comedy and the Watchers go pro.

**EMMA FROST** Our beloved White Queen wears baggy sweatsuits and eats Hagen Dazs while watching the Lifetime network. Only comic in history to be cancelled halfway through the first issue.

**SPRAY** A feline hero/mutant undergoes radical, life-altering changes when he begins "marking" his territory around the Marvel U., prompting run-ins with various heroes and villains.

**YOUNG XAVIER** Chuck—with only three strands of hair on his head—searches the globe for mutants while a young Moira MacTaggert always pulls that damn football away right before he kicks it.

**THUG** Rage, formerly of the Avengers and the New Warriors, changes his moniker to earn more street cred. Roaming the hood, he's mentored by the bantering ghosts of Tupac and Biggie Smalls.

**THE ETERNALS** Marvel's latest cutting-edge team book features the awe-inspiring line-up of Tonya Harding, Regis Philbin, Richard Simmons, Mariah Carey and other people who simply WON'T GO AWAY.

# The GREAT UNKNOWN

We flip through the quarter bins to unearth the top 10 most underrated comic stories ever told

By The Wizard Staff

# 10 THE LAST AVENGERS STORY (1995)

CREATORS: **Writer Peter David, artist Ariel Olivetti**
IF YOU LIKE: The classic heroes of *The Avengers*, the dark heroes from a future like *Kingdom Come* and a hero's "final" story like *Hulk: The End*, you'll like this.

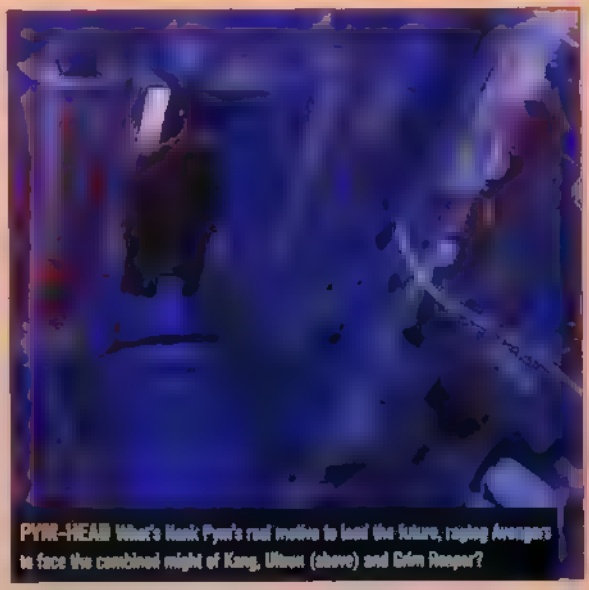
The Avengers have seen better days

Reduced to a roster of second-stringers, the team hasn't faced a real villain in years when writer Peter David and artist Ariel Olivetti's *Last Avengers Story* kicks off. It's just the moment Kang has waited for.

Traveling forward in time, Kang uncovers the story of how he will eventually destroy the greatest heroes the Earth has ever known. Murdering the entire current Avengers roster with a nuclear explosion, Kang—along with Ultron and the Grim Reaper—challenge the remaining Avengers to a final showdown.

As the only founding members left on Earth, Henry Pym and his wife, the Wasp, rally She-Hulk, Cannonball, the Human Torch and a few others to take on the Avengers' greatest enemy in a battle where no one gets away clean.

But as explosive as the story of the Avengers' final battle with Kang is, even more inspired is the story of what happened to the remaining Avengers. Thor, Hercules, the Thing and the Hulk left Earth for an enormous battle of the gods, but only Hulk returned; driven insane and evil, the Green Goliath turns on the remaining Avengers by ripping Tigra in half, then cracking Wonder Man's



**PYM-HEAD** What's Hank Pym's real motive to lead the future, raging Avengers to face the combined might of Kang, Ultron (above) and Grim Reaper?

impenetrable skin, which detonates like a huge nuclear explosion that kills both of them—and blinds Hawkeye. The FF is no more. Cap is now nothing more than a national myth. And then there's the tragic clash between the Scarlet Witch, Vision and Quicksilver, where one of them doesn't walk away from the scrape alive.

United by a battle they never wanted, the Avengers stand together against the most evil of plans—and then fall, one by one

# 9 G.I. JOE (Vol. 1) #94-#96 (1989)

CREATORS: **Writer Larry Hama, penciler Mark Bright and inker Randy Emberlin**
IF YOU LIKE: The silent warrior tone of *Wolverine*, the heavy artillery of *Punisher* and one-man-against-an-army action of "Die Hard," you'll go through boot camp for these.

Bullets get fired by the bushel, bodies stack up like firewood and the baddest of the bad is Snake-Eyes.

Wolverine, Punisher and other bloodthirsty crusaders can't match the damage G.I. Joe's silent soldier does in this three-issue tale, which starts off with him in Switzerland getting his ruined face repaired by a world-renowned plastic surgeon. Things get dicey when a squad of Cobra troopers kidnap the sedated ninja, but not before Baroness—who blames Snake-Eyes for the death of her brother in Vietnam—plugs his lady love Scarlett in the noggin with a .45!

Once Snake-Eyes is captured, the Cobras take him back to their New York embassy and torture him mercilessly. Snake-Eyes eventually escapes, but his face gets ruined once again when one of his captors hurls a vat of red-hot coals in his mug. Injured and thirsting for revenge, Snake-Eyes goes all Schwarzenegger and wipes out damn near every Cobra left to get to the Baroness.

Will Snake-Eyes complete his mission of vengeance? Was he really responsible for killing the Baroness' brother? How can Scarlett survive a point-blank headshot? The answers to all those questions can be found in this story, the quintessential example of what a G.I. Joe story should be: action, action, action... and when that runs out, more action!

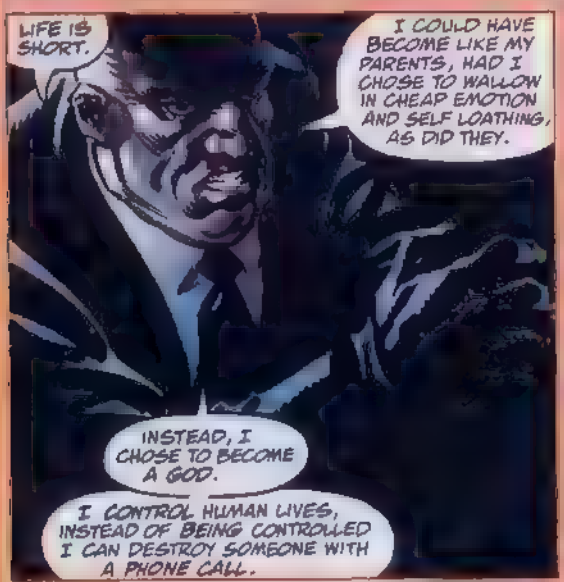
**MR. BADASS** When his girl Scarlett takes a bullet to the head, Snake-Eyes proves why he's G.I. Joe's one-man army corps.

# 8 LEX LUTHOR: THE UNAUTHORIZED BIOGRAPHY (1989)

CREATORS: **Writer James D. Hudnall, artist Eduardo Barreto**
IF YOU LIKE: The seedy who-do-you-trust elements of *100 Bullets* and definitive villain landmarks like *Batman: The Killing Joke*, you'll go bald for this.

Unauthorized or not, this bio begins exactly as it should—with Lex Luthor holding all of the cards.

Published in 1989, *Lex Luthor: The Unauthorized Biography* presents the definitive origin of the DCU's most manipulative villain, as crafted by writer James Hudnall (*Alpha Flight*) and artist Eduardo Barreto (*New Teen Titans*). Opening with a scene of a relaxed Luthor watching a video of Clark Kent being interrogated by police, the rest of the story is told primarily from the perspective of Peter Sands, a drunken, down-on-his-luck journalist who could use a paying gig. Conning his way into an advance check to write an unauthorized biography of Metropolis' biggest philanthropist, Sands successfully tracks down the few remaining people left alive who knew Luthor as he made a name for himself. After speaking with a schoolteacher, an insurance salesman and a shady mechanic, Sands pieces clues together—clues that indicate the auto wreck that killed Luthor's parents when he was 13 was no accident.


LIFE IS SHORT.
I COULD HAVE BECOME LIKE MY PARENTS, HAD I CHOSE TO WALLOW IN CHEAP EMOTION AND SELF LOATHING, AS DID THEY.
INSTEAD, I CHOSE TO BECOME A GOD.
I CONTROL HUMAN LIVES, INSTEAD OF BEING CONTROLLED I CAN DESTROY SOMEONE WITH A PHONE CALL.

Once his apartment is mysteriously ransacked, Sands realizes he needs serious protection. Knowing that Clark Kent is an acquaintance of Superman's, Sands convinces Kent to "track down" Superman for help before Luthor puts the permanent kibosh on Sands and his story.

An earthquake in Tokyo forces Kent to depart as Superman, but when he returns, he finds Sands brutally murdered with the name "Clark Kent" scrawled in blood. In one memorable scene, Kent loses his cool during his interrogation, pleading his innocence!

As the story comes to its shocking conclusion, you don't realize that Superman never actually appears...but rather that Luthor truly can make anything disappear.

# TOP 10 UNDERRATED CHARACTERS

You know who we're talking about. The guys that you always liked for some reason, but when you thought about it, never had that one, breakout story. They've had failed start-ups, poor creative direction or both. Here's our list of 10 faves, with an antidote to save each from the brink of obscurity.

**❶ FIRESTORM** Sporting one of comics' coolest designs, this Nuclear Man can alter anything on a molecular level—he's virtually unstoppable. Which is his problem. He needs a serious crutch to make him more vulnerable.

**❷ MOON KNIGHT** Awesome costume, bad character. Our recommendation is to dump the Fist of Khonshu's mercenary alter-ego Marc Spector and start from scratch to make him more an urban vigilante who scares the crap outta you.

**❸ COUNT NEFARIA** This mob boss once took out most of the Avengers his first time out. We take our cue here from *Avengers* writer Geoff Johns: make him a superpowered boss of super-hitmen.

**❹ GRAVITON** This Avengers villain boasts control over gravity, and should be a Magneto-class badass. But he hasn't done anything truly memorable in world-class chaos yet.

**❺ TIGER SHARK** The guy's more bulk than bite. Just tear his costume to let his power-boosting water pour out, and he's rendered helpless. Too bad—he's one baddie where you should be afraid to go near the water.

**❻ STINGRAY** Another Marvel hero who always looked cool with his underwater wing-thingies, but the oceanographer alter-ego needs more edge. The atrocities done to the ocean need to be explored by more than just Namor.

**❼ SUNFIRE** He's the X-Men's biggest jerk, whose fire-based powers leave teammates hot with anger. A member of Japan's royal family, he bolted the team after a short stint 'cuz he felt he was too good for the *gaijin* mutants! What better way to shake up the team nowadays than with this pompous chump?

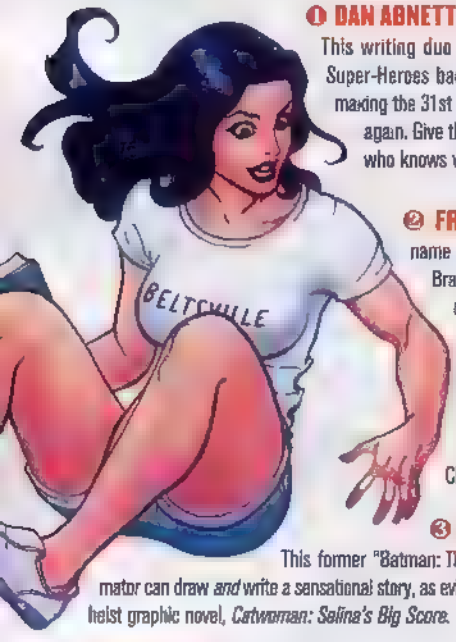
**❽ UNION JACK** He's England's version of Batman, even though he wears its flag. We'd like to see a UJ who fights down and dirty in the shadows with some Brit grit.

**❾ NOVA** Outside of his *New Warriors* stint in the early '90s, this super-strong and speedy teen has been played too close to hardluck hero Spider-Man. He needs to find his own way.

**❿ METAMORPHO** Rex Mason can alter his form into any natural element. It's too bad he's never really tapped into that giant chip on his shoulder—he's always been treated more as comic relief or a sad sack.

# TOP 10 UNDERRATED CREATORS

These are the creators that other creators rave about. Guys who have been kicking critically acclaimed ass all over the place. Their books are likely not in the Top 20, but take our word for it; keep an eye on them. You heard it here first.




**1 DAN ABNETT & ANDY LANNING** This writing duo brought the Legion of Super-Heroes back to its core, all while making the 31st century feel new all over again. Give these two the X-Men, and who knows what they could do.

**2 FRANK CHO** Making his name drawing *über*-babes like Brandy **(left)** on his syndicated *Liberty Meadows* comic strip (now published by Image), Cho's next project is a *Shanna the She-Devil* mini for Marvel's MAX line. Cho + nudity = white hot.

**3 DARWIN COOKE** This former "Batman: The Animated Series" animator can draw *and* write a sensational story, as evidenced by his rip-roaring heist graphic novel, *Catwoman: Selina's Big Score*.

**4 CHRISCROSS** *Captain Marvel*'s artist does a bang-up job on storytelling. His art is so crisp, we might as well call him Mr. Clean. Plus, he's almost 7 feet tall. So don't mess with him.

**5 SCOTT HANNA** Meet the artist's choice for inker for his sheer versatility, speediness and uncanny ability to make any art look like it was inked by the penciler himself. He can ink the thick pencil strokes of John Romita Jr. on *Amazing Spider-Man* or the super-detail of Tom Raney's *Thor*.

**6 GREG LAND** CrossGen's MVP stands one mega-event away from our Top 5 Hottest Artists list. This artist can not only draw gorgeous women, he has enormous range, from *Sojourn*'s medieval times to *Nightwing*'s urban nightmare.

**7 MICHAEL LARK** This Vertigo vet's one part David Mazzucchelli, one part comic legend Milt Caniff. Just check out *Gotham Central*, and you'll see Lark has the perfect hard-boiled, noir style for any street-level tale of urban drama.

**8 TIM LEVINS** Don't judge this guy as an "animated-style only" artist. His clever camera angles on kid-friendly *Batman: Gotham Adventures* make him the strongest to wield the style since Bruce Timm. Editors take note: Let this guy develop his own style, and you'll have a dependably stylish Mark Bagley-type to tap.

**9 RAGS MORALES** The detail-oriented penciler of *Hawkman* reminds us of *JLA/JSA*'s Carlos Pacheco. If you give the guy some time to work his mojo on a special project or two, it'll look just as slick.

**10 DAMION SCOTT** We'll come right out and say it: This quirky *Batgirl* artist was born to draw Spider-Man. The guy draws kinetic, Jet Li-style fight scenes like nobody's business, and Spidey's the perfect guy to showcase it.

## 7 BATMAN: HOLY TERROR (1991)

CREATORS: **Writer Alan Brennert, artist Norm Breyfogle**

IF YOU LIKE. Batman, envelope-pushing Elseworlds like *Kingdom Come* and the twists of Marvel's *What If ..?*, you'll find your religion right here

Batman's unleashed a holy war on the criminals of Gotham City for decades. In *Batman: Holy Terror*, the Dark Knight wages a literal one with his vengeful eye on a Roman Catholic-like Church, which just happens to be full of villains.

In DC's second-ever Elseworlds tale from 1991, writer Alan Brennert and artist Norm Breyfogle place Bruce Wayne in a world where there is no separation of church and state. *Holy Terror* sees a young Bruce Wayne watch his parents gunned down during an apparent mugging, but instead of training the next decade to become a crimefighting superhero, Wayne instead dedicates his life to the church as a reverend. That is, until he finds out the church's Holy Elite might have had his parents executed.

Donning the cape and cowl of Batman, Wayne begins to uncover how the church has executed anyone who disagreed with its policies, used homosexuals as guinea pigs for medical research and even captured JLAers such as Flash, Aquaman and Metamorpho to learn the secrets of their vast power.

But the church's greatest secret lies with the mysterious "Green Man." Rumored to be the one person who could challenge the church's great power, Batman seeks him out—but what he finds isn't what anyone expected.

**JUDAS PRIEST** When he learns his parents were killed by the Church, Bruce Wayne tries to lose his religion.

# 6 PRIDE & JOY (1997)

**CREATORS** Writer Garth Ennis, artist John Higgins
**IF YOU LIKE:** The graphic violence of *Preacher*, the twists of both *100 Bullets* and "The Fugitive," you'll go trigger happy for this.

In *Pride & Joy*, the family that stays together gets slayed together

In this mature-readers mini-series, family's everything to Jimmy Kavanagh—he idolized his father and learned everything important about being a man from his dad, who served two tours as a waist-gunner on a B-17 in World War II. Those lessons get reinforced years later, when Jimmy's forced to raise his two kids on his own after his wife passes away from cancer. Things aren't all rosy on the home front, however; Jimmy and his eldest son Patrick, who's 18 and heading off to Harvard, don't see eye to eye on anything, which makes for a combustible atmosphere around the Kavanagh house.

But things really heat up when two of Jimmy's former "business associates"—Lenny and Gerry Lucchese—bust out of prison and show up at Jimmy's doorstep looking for help. Seems Jimmy used to be a burglar back in the day, and he and the Luccheses double-crossed a scary-ass goon by the name of Stein, the most sadistic enforcer operating in Hell's Kitchen (Imagine a gangster who's Kingpin-powerful with Hannibal Lecter's table manners) From there on out, Jimmy, his two kids and the Luccheses are on the road trying to escape Stein's murderous reach, but it always seems like he's one step ahead of our runaway heroes.

After much bloodshed, the revelation of various deep, dark family secrets and a tense interstate chase, it all shakes down to a deadly showdown between Jimmy and Stein—one lives, one dies and one family is radically changed forever. Clearly, this story's the hidden pride and joy of Ennis' résumé.

**TWO-GUN KID** In a warm-up for *Preacher*, writer Garth Ennis tries out some ultra-violent revenge tactics in *Pride & Joy*.

# BARGAIN BIN

**What true fanboy doesn't dig on trawling the quarter bins at a show to find good comics at a cheap price?**

**Heck, the *Wizard* staffers do the exact same thing whenever we hit a show, so we pored over our personal collections, hit our library and scoured quarter bins to whip up this list of Bargain Bin gems. If you've got a couple bucks to spare at your next con, hit the quarter bins and look for these little ditties!**

**DOCTOR STRANGE (vol. 1) #56** Consider this "Dr. Strange 101": Roger Stern and Paul Smith craft an excellent retelling of Strange's origins, but it's more than a recap story, as the Doctor is definitely in against three mystical foes out for revenge.

**GHOST RIDER (vol. 1) #68** Another fantastic origin tale by Stern, who adds new layers to Johnny Blaze's beginnings as the Spirit of Vengeance. Learn the family connections that haunted Blaze long before he became a demon, and be on the lookout for a great twist as Blaze recounts his struggles to a priest during confession.

**IRON MAN (vol. 1) #215-#216** Three Michelinie and Bob Layton wrote a damn fine run of *Iron Man* during the mid- to late-1980s, and here's a highlight: Iron Man and Rhodey team up as a pair of Iron Men to battle A.I.M. and a traitor within Stark Enterprises. The result? Just check out the cover to the right...

**JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA (vol. 1) #252-#254** True, this incarnation of the League included terrible, Z-grade heroes like Vibe and Gypsy—but that's also what makes this story so memorable. When Despero returns to Earth with near-omnipotent power, it's up to this minor-league League—with some help from Batman and Martian Manhunter—to stop the space-faring dictator from taking over Earth. But because the team is so bad, readers are actually left doubting if they can handle it!

**KING CONAN #5-#8** A sprawling, barbaric epic by Roy Thomas, John Buscema and Ernie Chan sees King Conan running into cut-throats, monsters, demons and pirates while traveling across various lands in his mythic realm on the hunt for his wife, Queen Zenobia, who was kidnapped and used as a pawn by the evil wizard Yah Chieng.

**MOON KNIGHT (vol. 1) #14** Before comics noir become fashionable with books like *100 Bullets*, this issue of *Moon Knight*—with stunning art by Bill Sienkiewicz—served up a good, ol' fashioned, hard-boiled crime tale about hidden family secrets, the consequences of violence and bloody redemption.

**POWER MAN & IRON FIST #90** Kurt Busiek (*Astro City, Power Company*) penned this tale, which finds disenchanted X-Men villain Unus the Untouchable giving up his world-conquering ways and settling for a life of lucrative but petty crimes. But when the Times Square protectors Power Man and Iron Fist confront this mutant, do they have a hope in hell of stopping him?

**THE NEW TEEN TITANS ANNUAL #2** A kick-ass story by Marv Wolfman and George Pérez! When the Titans start harassing a local mobster that Robin's gunning for, the gangster hires an army of super-assassins to make the Titans dead! See Robin pushed to his breaking point, as well as the first appearance of the new Vigilante!

# 5 SANDMAN MYSTERY THEATRE #41-#44 (1996)

**CREATORS: Writers Matt Wagner and Steven T. Seagle, artist Guy Davis**

**IF YOU LIKE:** The moody creepiness of "Seven" and the desolate landscape populated by conflicted heroes in *The Golden Age*, you'll kill to read this.

If you think of the 1930s as a nostalgic period where the world was more innocent, you've never read *Sandman Mystery Theater* #41-#44.

In "The Phantom of the Fair"—definitely for the mature reader—Wesley Dodds, a.k.a. the Golden Age Sandman, follows the trail of a perverted serial killer who preys on homosexual men. Writers Matt Wagner (*Grendel*) and Steven T. Seagle (*Superman*) and artist Guy Davis (*Fantastic Four: Unstable Molecules*) provide the 1939 New York World's Fair as a backdrop for the killer's escapades as the mutilated body of a young man surfaces on the fairgrounds on opening day. The shady Mr. Whalen (the Fair's president) attempts to stage a cover-up, but not before the take-no-B.S. Lt. Burke (who's been a thorn in the Sandman's side since *Sandman Mystery Theatre* began) is alerted of the body's existence. Dodds, visiting the fair with his ladyfriend Dian Belmont, happens to see Burke heading up the investigation and immediately deducts that there has been a murder.

DON'T YOU INTERRUPT YOUR BETTERS, PERVERT!
AND YOU'RE JOINING HIM!
WHY ARE YOU HESITATING? I THOUGHT WE WERE GOING TO!
TO WHAT? TOUCH EACH OTHER? ARRE EACH OTHER? PUT OURSELVES INSIDE EACH OTHER?
WELL, YES.
SEX IS NOT A GAME TO PLAY!

**SEXY BEAST** A sexual predator stalks the 1939 World's Fair, and only the Sandman can get down and dirty to find him before another friend bites it.

As Dodds begins his own investigation as the Sandman, readers are provided with brief glimpses of the killer, who's dubbed himself "The Phantom of the Fair," leaving notes pinned to the naked bodies of his victims. While his face remains hidden in shadows (or decked out in an ultra-creepy S&M mask), the Phantom's methodical killings involve attracting his victims and playfully flirting with them before knocking them unconscious. Each victim awakens trussed up in the Phantom's underground lair, where he proceeds to berate them, proclaiming their evil.

Most disturbing is the fact that the Phantom tortures his victims for days at a time before finishing them off. He's delusional, tormented by the voice of his homophobic father who urges him to carry out his grisly killings from beyond the grave.

Wagner and Seagle parallel the Phantom's deadly schizophrenia with Dodds' own recently unearthed homophobia. After learning that his colleague, New York University Professor Robert Li, is gay, Dodds feels both deceived and disgusted. Realizing that his discomfort is unwarranted, Dodds still questions his feelings as he lurks through the city as the Sandman and the bodies continue piling up.

As clues to the Phantom's true identity surface, the creative team teases readers with a couple of Golden Age cameos. First, in issue #42, Jim Corrigan (the cop who eventually becomes The Spectre) shows up to clash with Lt. Burke, threatening to get results on the Phantom case using his own brutal tactics. Then, in issue #43, the Sandman stumbles into a shootout between local mobsters and the pistol-packin' Crimson Avenger, who doesn't take kindly to interference from other mystery men.

Ultimately, we learn that Dodds has a vested personal interest in bringing the Phantom down, as guilt from an event that happened 20 years prior (coupled with a murder that strikes close to home) finds the Sandman driven to justice like never before.

"How does it feel to receive your own punishment in kind?" asks the Sandman when he and the Phantom finally meet mask to mask. "Scurry all you wish, but you will NOT emerge from this night." But can the Sandman triumph over a man driven by both his own demons and those of a bigoted father?

# 4 THE SPECTRE (Vol. 1) #1-#12 (1992-93)

**CREATORS:** **Writer John Ostrander and artist Tom Mandrake**

**IF YOU LIKE:** The cold revenge of *Punisher*, the creepiness of *30 Days of Night* and the supernatural payback of *Hellblazer*, you'll go through Hell to read this

Meet comics' original "punisher."

Despite two previously failed series in the Spectre's 60 years of existence, this 1992 run proves the third time nails it by evolving this spirit of vengeance into the actual "Wrath of God." Writer John Ostrander and artist Tom Mandrake explore concepts of humanity, the afterlife, sexual taboo and revenge—and twists them in very entertaining and unpredictable ways. Unfolding over the course of 12 issues, numerous seemingly random events occur all around the Spectre but eventually come full circle, converging into quite possibly the most tense, nail-biting comic issue ever created.

The story opens with the spirit of Jim Corrigan—a bitter ex-cop who was murdered and resurrected by a higher power to rid the world of evil—at the hospital "visiting" Louis Snipe, the stool pigeon who brokered a deal with the mob to arrange Corrigan's death many years earlier. Before Corrigan can obtain whatever secrets Snipe still has buried safely away in his mind, a drive-by shooting outside the hospital springs the Spectre into action. As he dismantles and torments the conniving hoodlums (Spectre turns them into his own fingers before fashioning a hypodermic needle to inject into his arm, thus burning them alive), he says, "With guns, with drugs, you deal death, and you feel nothing. It's time you learned how it feels." A witness to these events is Amy Beltermann, a young social worker who is stunned when a hail of bullets flies right through the body of Corrigan before his transformation. Naturally, a curious attraction forms.

As Amy and Corrigan gradually come to know one another, Amy uncovers the cop's sacred mission as the Spectre. Ostrander weaves in multiple dangling plot threads, such as a mysterious serial killer who carefully selects female victims with AIDS, Amy's own battle with AIDS and how she's a future target for the killer; the hidden agenda of DC mage Madame Xanadu; and the inner conflict of the Spectre himself—a god-like being torn between the shreds of humanity that still exist within him and an unquenchable thirst for vengeance.

While Ostrander delivers the twists and turns that meander in and out of *The Spectre*, Mandrake's pencils never cease to evoke one of the eeriest moods ever seen in comics. Whether it's capturing a surprisingly remorseful Spectre after incinerating the hot-rodding gang members in issue #1, or a livid Spectre displaying his balls-out force while taking on the demon Shathan in Hell in issue #5, Mandrake knows how to elicit chills. He proves equally adept at contrasting innocents like Amy with criminals who melt into popping pools of flesh (and other colorful forms of punishment the Spectre dishes out).

In issue #12, as a year's worth of characters and events finally collapse upon each other, the Spectre must race to save Amy (pursued by the killer) while battling Azmodus, a demon who steals people's shadows before consuming their souls. In the end, the Spectre not only rushes to Amy's side, but also must come to terms that perhaps a small sliver of his own soul remains.

# 3 JSA: THE LIBERTY FILES #1-#2 (2000)

CREATORS. **Writers Dan Jolley and Tony Harris, artists Tony Harris and Ray Snyder**

IF YOU LIKE: The WWII intensity of "Saving Private Ryan," the espionage of *Nick Fury: Agent of SHIELD*, twist ending of "Signs" and the cool edge of *The Golden Age*, you'll file this one away.

War is hell—just ask Batman, Dr. Mid-Nite and Hourman.

If you think this trio is cool as superheroes, you might want to check them out as super-spies in DC's *JSA: The Liberty Files* mini-series. In Dan Jolley and Tony Harris' Elseworlds story, the superheroes of World War II take a backseat to its saboteurs: The Bat, the Clock and the Owl.

The story focuses on the hunt for Adolf Hitler's super-man, a being from another world with superhuman abilities—the Führer's quickest route to victory over the Allied forces. Hot on the trail of Hitler and his new weapon are the U.S.'s top three spies.

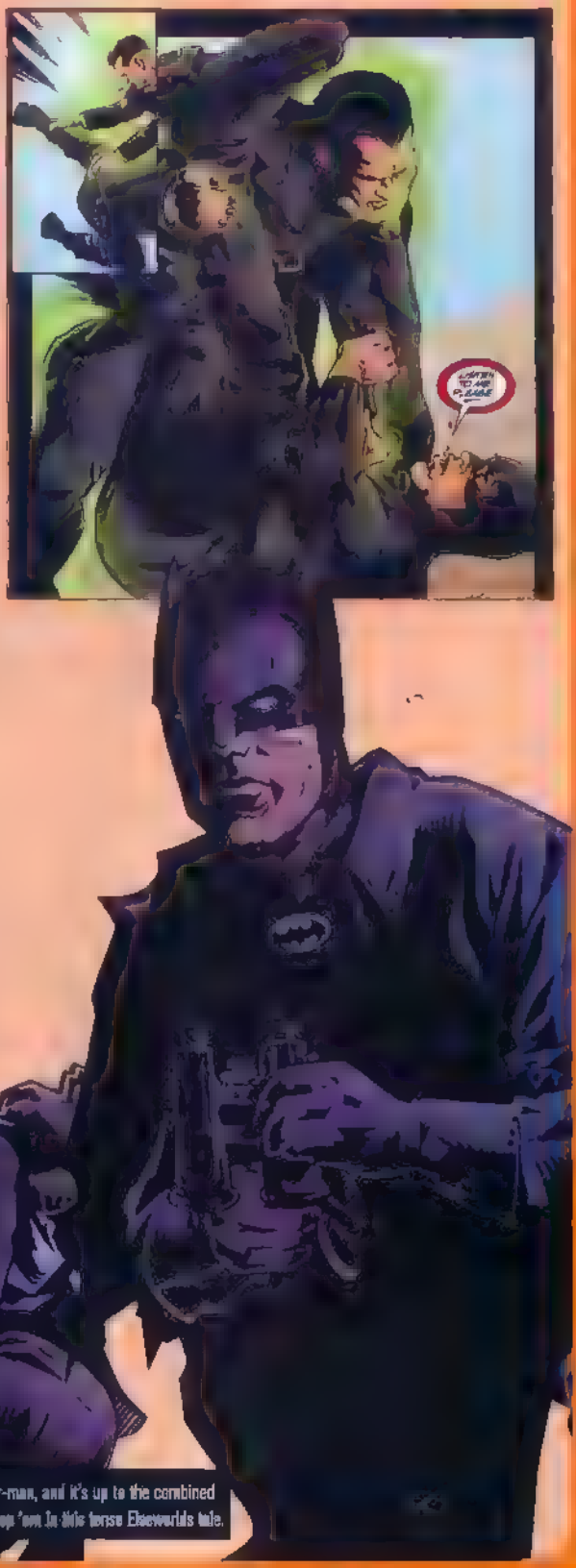
Of course, not everyone makes it out alive, thanks to Hitler's own spies, all based on DC bad guys such as the Joker and the Scarecrow. From start to finish, the tension never lets up in the series, as the Joker—in the form of an Albino sociopath named Jack—downs a U.S. plane and the Scarecrow, a cannibalistic nutjob offs a few of your favorite Golden Age heroes.

One of the most amazing things about *Liberty Files* isn't its cast of characters though—it's how the series presents them. With subtle digs and references to other heroes such as Black Canary, Robin, Sgt. Rock and even Private Ryan, the series shines as one of the best adventures ever told in an Elseworlds format. And the distrust and rivalry between each hero makes the series all the more enjoyable. Take the Bat's response to being asked what he's writing in his notebook—he rips out the page, burns it and then politely says, "Nothing," with a smile.

And while the series contains superhuman powers, heroes in garish costumes and one really pissed-off alien, at its heart the *Liberty Files* stands as one kick-ass World War II adventure.

Of course, don't expect any of the usual contraptions the heroes are currently using to show up in the series—in fact, these aren't the heroes you know at all. The Clock—a.k.a. Hourman—still uses a pill to increase his strength and size, but he also rips people in half with his increased strength. The Bat—a.k.a. Batman—still has a utility belt, but instead of grappling hooks and stun guns, he carries grenades and even a pistol.

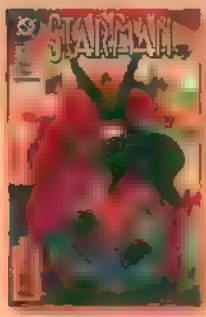
In one of the most bizarre and gruesome slugfests in comics, the Scarecrow takes on Mr. Terrific, the Bat and the Clock all at once and pays the price for his hubris. Filled full of lead by the Clock, stabbed by Mr. Terrific and finally blown up by the Bat, the Scarecrow finally learns that war really is hell—but it makes for a helluva good read, too.



**STRANGE ALLIES** Hitler has his own super-man, and it's up to the combined might of The Bat, Mr. Terrific and others to stop 'em in this terse Elseworlds tale.

# 2 STARMAN #11 (1995)

CREATORS **Writer James Robinson, artist Matt Smith**
COLLECTED In *Starman: Times Past* trade paperback
IF YOU LIKE The heroes of *JSA* and the carnage of *The Golden Age*, you'll travel through time for this.




As the Golden Age of comics drew to an end, there was a shadow falling across the landscape

The brightly colored crusaders of that time found that the villains they once dispatched with minima. effort and a hearty laugh were being replaced by murderous psychopaths wi ling to kill at the drop of a hat. As the members of the Justice Society of America were growing older, the job of being a superhero was becoming more deadly, while burgeoning heroes like Superman and Batman—used to dealing with the colorful crazies—were slowly but surely replacing their forefathers in the JSA.

Not only was this happening in comics continuity, it was happening on the racks, as well. The Golden Age heroes simply had no creative outlet in 1995, but with this story—entitled "13 Years Ago· Five Old Friends"—Robinson showed that no matter how old you are, being a superhero actually meant something

Related to the reader by Opal City resident and sometime-supervillain The Shade, "13 Years Ago" starts out with a deadly crime spree being perpetrated by the Ragdoll and his deadly cult of followers. The Ragdoll had always been a third-rate super-criminal, but he discovered he had a talent for swaying the disenfranchised of the city, and soon, Opal City was caught in the grip of panic as Ragdoll and his lethal cult followers terrorized the city

Starman, a.k.a. Ted Knight, and the police were powerless to halt the Ragdo l's rampage, so other JSAers—including Hourman, Dr. Mid-Nite, Green Lantern and the Flash—were called in to lend a helping hand After Mid-Nite and Hourman successfully complete their portoons of the mission, it's up to Flash, GL and Starman to unravel Ragdoll's final scheme, and as relayed by the Shade, "these three heroes ..they come close surely [to being gods]. With their deeds and their hearts and their hopes." Victory in hand, the trio of JSAers take a moment to celebrate their hard-fought win, secure in the knowledge they've saved the city

And then Ragdoll speaks and what he says rocks the heroes to their very core. (See the sequence below if you don't believe us.)

"13 Years Ago" uses a certain rhythm and language—an element sometimes ignored in mainstream comics—in telling a tale that evokes the innocence of the Golden Age without sounding hokey, while at the same time making heroes from the 1940s relevant to today's readers.

This story perfectly nails what it takes to be a hero, and the kinds of questions they deal with daily. This isn't a job for them—it's a calling, a m.ssion and a duty to do right. It's this theme that Robinson explores throughout his run on *Starman*, but one which he distilled to its perfect essence in this tale.

**RUN RAGDOLL!** Third-tier lowlife Ragdoll gets amped up in this *Starman* tale as the JSA confronts a horrific situation they've never encountered before.

FLASH GARRICK, YOU HAVE A NICE FLASH GARRICK AT HOME. DON'T YOU?
GARDEN RIVAL, YOU HAVE A BROADCASTING COMPANY FULL OF EMPLOYEES, AND BUILDINGS THAT COULD JUST AS EASILY BE TURNED IF BOMBS WERE PLACED WITHIN THEM.
AND MR. HOURMAN, MR. OPAL CITY, YOU HAVE SOME NC
ALL THESE SOULS, THESE PEOPLE YOU, YOU'D DEAR. I'D MAKE MY FINAL PEACE WITH THEM
IF I WERE YOU

# STRIKEFORCE: MORITURI #1-#8 (1986-87)

**CREATIVE TEAM: Writer Peter B. Gillis, penciler Brent Anderson, inker Scott Williams**

**IF YOU LIKE:** The humanity of *Rising Stars*, the media sensation of *X-Statix* and the struggle over seemingly impossible odds of "Aliens," you'll die for this book.

Would you die for superpowers?

The individuals in *Strikeforce: Morituri* would. And, because of those powers, they do. No matter what.

Marvel's mid-1980s sci-fi series explored the meaning of true heroism…and its price. Set in the not-so-distant future, Earth lies ravaged by sadistic aliens called The Horde, and Earth must manufacture its own super-soldiers to stop them. The series stars a rare breed of humans capable of surviving the Morituri process—however, the process condemns them to each die within a year's time, as that's the duration the human body can withstand the power. ("Morituri" is Latin for "we who are about to die.")

And die they do. One by one. Always in an explosive blaze. Always at the worst possible time.

Death haunts the entire series, with tons of metaphors. Before joining, characters have a "last day" on the job, they wonder how their stories "end" and one scared set of parents lament, "Our son's going off to become a dead man." Even the Morituri HQ is described at first viewing as "so green and peaceful…so much like a cemetery."

*Morituri* also explores the psychology of certain death, and what kind of person it would take to give up their lives for a cause. Some characters handle it badly. One member cracks in the middle of the night, pleading, "I don't want to die!" Another romanticizes his life, hoping to squeeze in a memoir before his ticket's punched. Besides their lives, each member loses their innocence.

With that comes a warning: Don't get too attached. You'll quickly grow to like these characters for their feats and their foibles, their humanity despite their mortality. But, ultimately, all will perish.

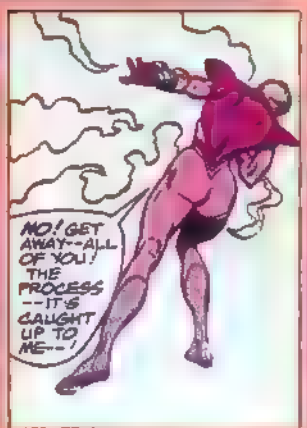
The first batch of super-soldiers include: Harold, a blue-collar wannabe writer whose sensory powers make him the perfect leader; the energy-emitting Aline, the former nerd who takes each teammate's death very hard; plasma-blaster Lorna, the flirt who takes to Harold and discovers the hard way that love is fleeting; the skittish Louis, whose radiation powers need special filters, Jelene, the fragile Christian who can analyze and counteract any artifact; and Robert, whose super-sized strength pushes him farther away from his own humanity.

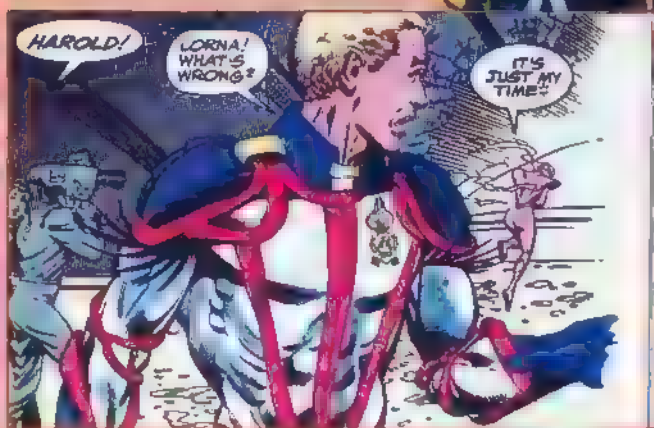
Even the team's commanders question their own humanity, wondering if they have a right to condemn children to fight their war. Dr. Kimmo Tuolema, inventor of the Morituri process, appears visibly shaken when he explains to the first batch he must leave them "to begin developing your…replacements." Throughout the series, Tuolema spends many sleepless nights trying to fix the mortality of his formula.

The twisted alien Horde also looks to "solve" its new Morituri problem, but it's had a lot of practice in torture. Pillaging the planet's resources doesn't cut it for these monsters. They toy with the world's citizens using guerrilla-style mindgames. They "high-dive" people by dropping them out of orbiting ships a mile up just to see them fry on re-entry. They collect human heads as trophies. These bastards even attach live, human heads to armored bodies to fight a startled Strikeforce.

This series presents the strongest work of writer Peter B. Gillis, whose time with *Morituri* was his unfortunate

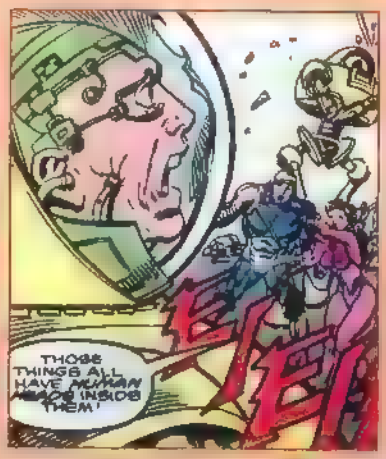
**DEAD MEN WALKING** While all are very likable characters, don't get too attached to your favorite Morituri team members. Their superpowers kill them within a year. Check out the fiery doom of one member below.



swan song to comics. Not to mention Brent Anderson (*Astro City*, *Rising Stars*), whose visuals go out of their way to heighten flawed characters who get put through the wringer. In fact, this pair's run spans the first 20 issues, which forms one giant arc that sees the death of the last original member. In later issues, you'll see a Morituri traitor who contacts the Horde when they offer a cure for the process; a Morituri vs. Morituri brawl between two generations; and the ultimate fate of Aline's pregnancy.

Even though the series is long gone, time has not run out on *Strikeforce: Morituri*. Cable's Sci-Fi Channel will adapt the concept for TV later this year as "A Thousand Days" (no doubt




expanding the lifespan of its heroes from one to three-plus years—makes sense if you wanna keep cast members around). Hopefully, that could mean Marvel will repackage it in trade paperback (hint hint).

*Morituri* was so clearly before its time. But unlike what's true for the title characters, time is still on your side. Go dig up this run before someone beats you to it.

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*Mike Cotton, Brian Cunningham, Pat McCallum, Matt Senreich, Andy Serwin and Jesse Thompson all contributed to this article. Tell us about your favorite underrated story at* www.wizarduniverse.com

# CLAW & ORDER

**The new creative team of Greg Rucka and Darick Robertson relaunch WOLVERINE's solo series this May and return the wild mutant to his savage roots**

By Casey Seijas

Wolverine can be described as many things—a deadly assassin, a misunderstood hero, a dude named James or a bathroom drain's worst nightmare.

However, when writer Greg Rucka (*Elektra, Queen & Country*) thinks of Marvel's mystery mutant, only one description leaps to mind.

"He's the original Marvel badass," exclaims Rucka. "He makes everyone else in the Marvel Universe look like candy-asses. There is nobody else in the Marvel U. you should be afraid of pissing off as much as him. And despite what Garth Ennis thinks, the Punisher wouldn't stand a chance against him."

Kicking off this May, Rucka gets the opportunity to prove that point when he teams up with penciler Darick Robertson (*Fury*), and the duo intend to show fans exactly why they believe Wolverine is still the best there is at what he does. And it all starts with what makes the "bad ass" mutant tick.

Yet a new creative team and direction aren't the only things Marvel has in store for Wolverine this year. Rucka and Robertson's run will see the title relaunch with an all-new #1 issue, which kicks off a five-part storyarc that finds Wolvie in a situation unlike any he's encountered before—that of a concerned citizen who's in the wrong place at the wrong time.

"What happens in the first issue is that he becomes a witness unwittingly to something—to a great injustice," hints Rucka. "And at the end of the first issue, he kind of realizes what it is that happened and the issues after that have him taking steps to redress the crime. It's a girl who's been wronged and Logan's going to try to put it right, or at least get some payback for her."

Not happy with Rucka's hints? Wizard's got your hook-up. Check out the following 22 pages and see for yourself why this Canadian badass kicks the crap out of any and all comers!

Mean Man were you ever lonely?
Were you ever scared?
Smoker
Me, I'm scared all the time
Lonely all the time
Hey, can I get a refill here?
Or maybe just alone
Decaf, right?
Right.
So... when do you get off work?
It makes you desperate

You know why I love the rain, Mean Man? It's like in that movie, they talk about it, how it makes everything clean.
Well, I wish I could say it's been a pleasure...
That's why I love the rain.
...but you're not even worth the lie.
Don't spend it all in one place
Can't remember the last time I felt c ean
Hey--
It's not just me t s the whole world that's been used and trashed and beaten down.
--you and your money can both go to e@#&!
It's a mean world, Mean Man, and that s the truth.
Full of mean people with mean hearts who do mean things

A mean, mean wor d
What? Huh?
You got something to say? s that it?
So maybe you have to be mean just to survive.
You hoping for an eyeful, too? That it?
And that s the name of the game, isn't it?
Survival?

You never asked my story, Mean Man.
DINER
Pay it when you're ready
I thought it was because you didn't *care*.
Whatever
But that's not right, is it? It's *not* that you didn't *care*...
...it's because you thought you *already* knew it.

Hell, maybe you *did* know it, maybe all this 's, it's *just*... maybe it s *just* a waste of *time*.
Maybe I m, like, totally wrong, and you *are* what you seemed at first.
But I don't think so, Mean Man.
See, I think I figured you out
Maybe it's only the *meanest* of them a who can afford to g ve a *damn*.

I don't know when they're coming. I don't know what they'll do when they get here.
I just know that they will, and that when it happens, it'll be bad for me
Maybe they'll just come and take me back, say that it's time to come home.
The Geek Group
Like that place ever was my home.
If that's what they want, I won't go.
I won't go back there
They'll have to kill me first
Is that something else you know about?
Killing?

Or maybe you're just ~nnh~
~hoping for an *eyeful*?
Go to sleep kid
The Geek Group

Now, I've seen tough and I've seen pain.
And I know I'm not tough, because I've been in pain.
I also know what I saw that night, and when I saw you the next morning, Mean Man, you didn't have a scratch on you
Not a scratch.
That's how I knew you were my guy.

Maybe you knew it, too.
In a mean world, you've got to portion out caring, right?
You have to pick your battles. Decide who's worth the effort.
The measure can be arbitrary, it doesn't matter
Idiot left behind his book.
...as long as the measure is yours, right?
I'll take it.
...long as you don't take my tips, I could care less.

Why do we need to make up some excuse just to say hello?
Are we so scared we can't even just be, you know, peop e? We have to justify it, lie about it?
Is that all you were doing? Giving me the excuse?
Letting me make the first move?
Did you know how terrifying t was for me to even try?
And you weren't going to make it easy, were you?

NOK
NOK
NOK
You
I brought you .
. you forgot your..
...I've got your book.
Can I... may I come in?
I won't stop you

I'd offer you one, but something tells me you're a *minor*.
No, thanks
Here's... here's your *book*.
What's your name, kid?
I'm not a *kid*.
What's your name, *neighbor*?
I already know yours
Yeah?
Well, kinda. I *gave* you a name
You gonna *share* t?

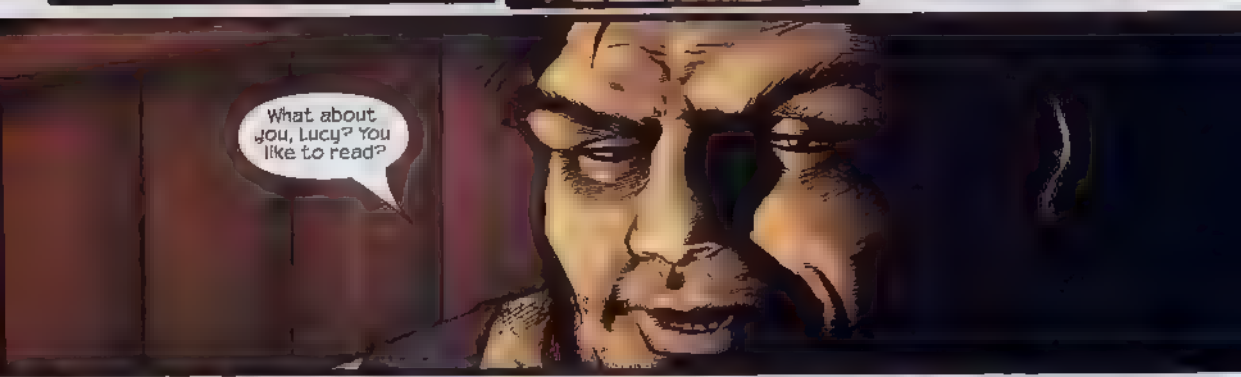
Mean Man.
Seems kinda judgmental
Guess t does, kinda. Not that you're mean, though maybe you are, I don't know
Nice place
It's enough
You read all these?
Working through them.
Guess you like to read, huh?
You've got a different book everyday, when I see you at the diner.
Safe guess
I read fast.
s that a l you do? Just read?
I mean, all day, you just read?
I do other things
EDGAR ALLAN POE

Like get stabbed?
Sometimes
Who stabbed you?
Does it matter?
It does, Jean, it really does.

Like if you get stabbed doing a mean thing to a not-mean guy, that kinda blows.
But if you're doing a mean thing to a mean guy, that's cooler

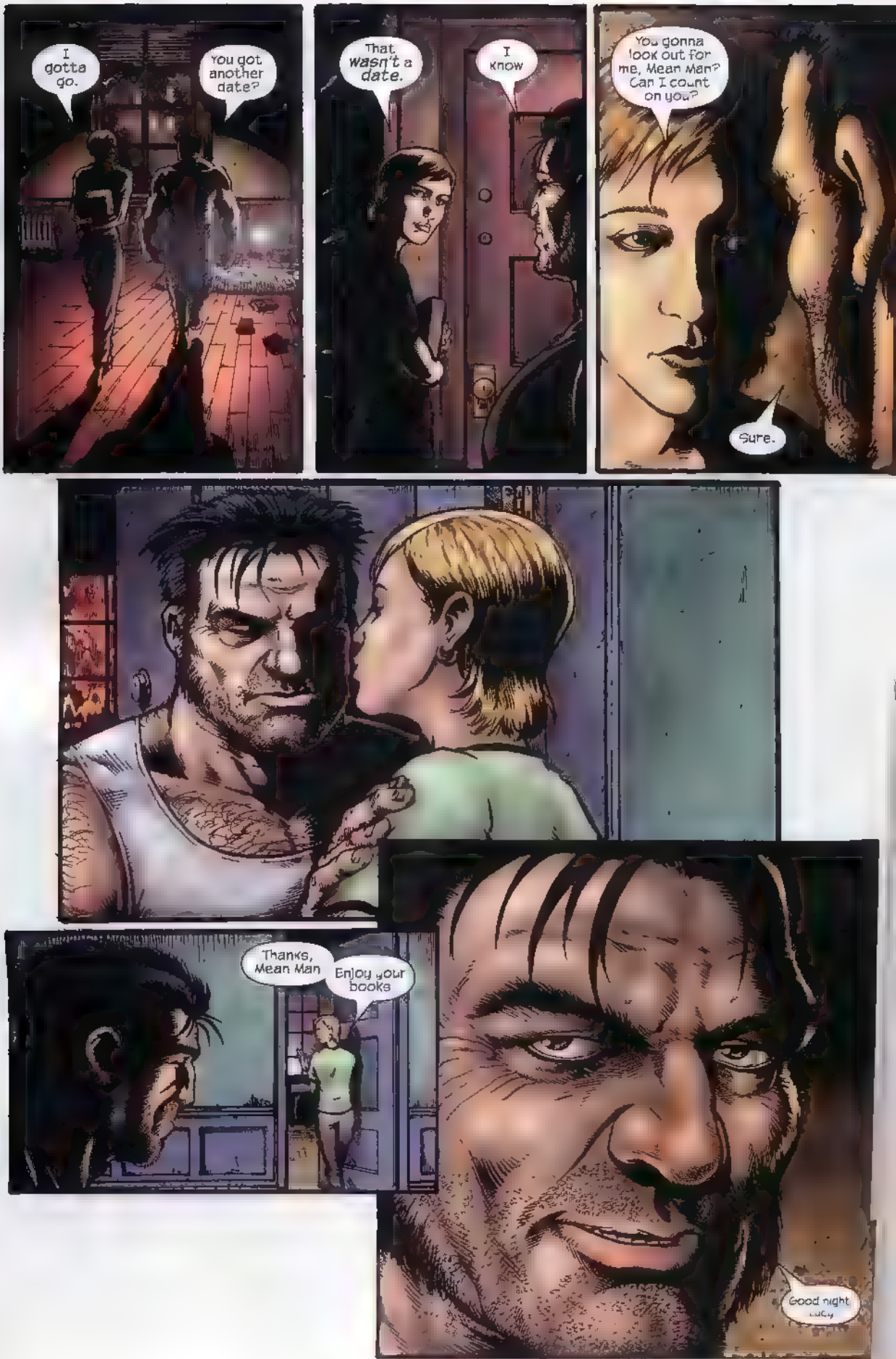
What makes you think a Mean Man would care about the difference, Lucy?

Mean Man reads a lot.
That's got to count for something, right?


What about you, Lucy? You like to read?

I used to. Now I just write.
Writing's good. No writing, nothing for me to read.
I'd let you read my thing, if you could find it. I keep it hidden.

Can I borrow these?
Sure.
You can have them back when I'm done.


I gotta go.
You got another date?
That wasn't a date.
I know
You gonna look out for me, Mean Man? Can I count on you?
Sure.
Thanks, Mean Man
Enjoy your books
Good night

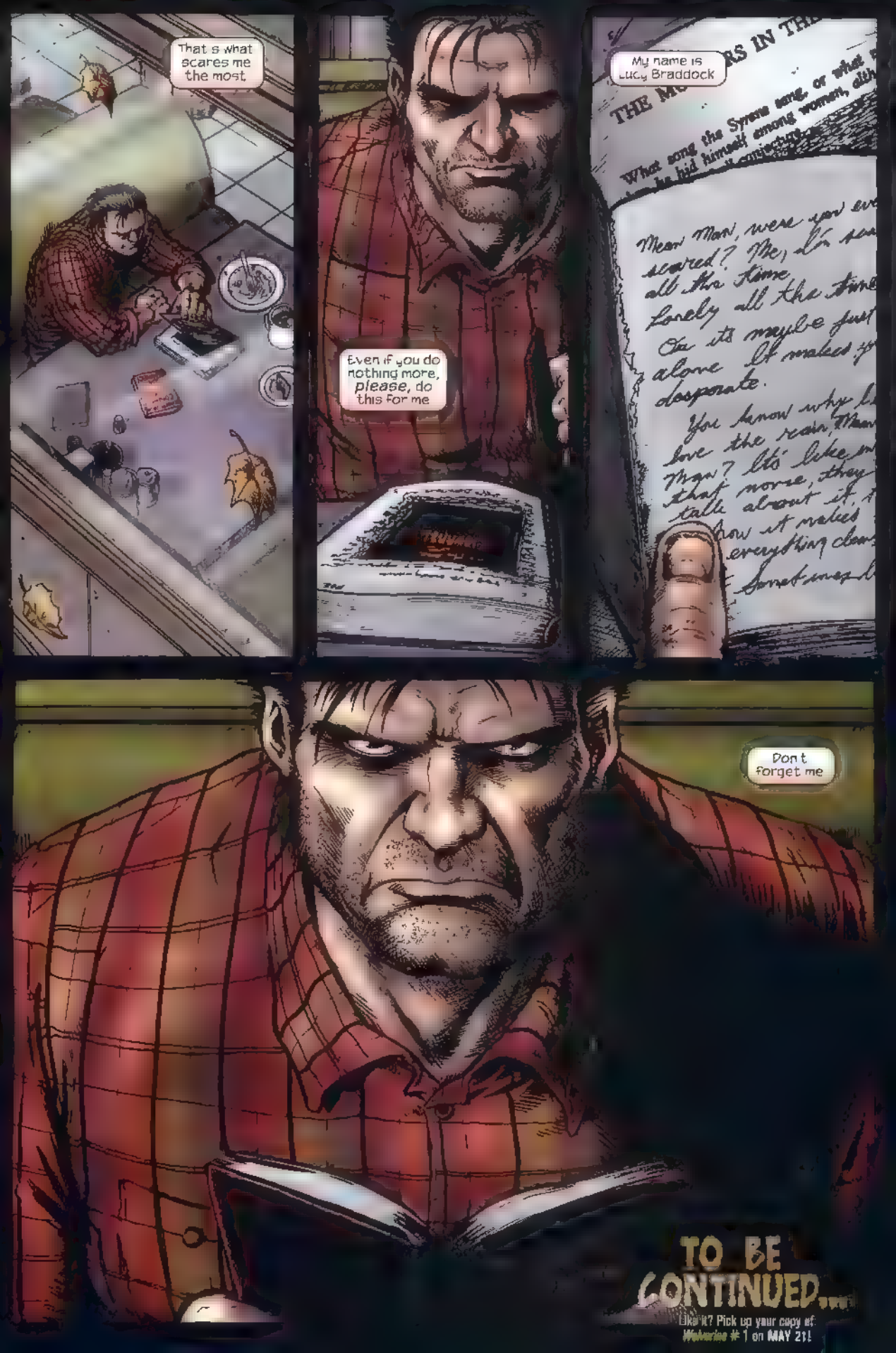
I believe you, Mean Man, and you have no idea what that means to me, do you?
It's like I can sleep tonight you know? Really sleep, really rest, and not worry anymore
You're across the hall from me, and now you know me, and they can stab you in the leg, hell, that won't stop you.
it makes me feel safe
Did you get it, Mean Man?
Was I clear enough?
When they've come for me will you do what I need?

See, I can't give you *everything*, because I can't be sure you'll be the one to get it
A lot of it you're just gonna have to figure out on your own, and if I could, I would make it easier. But I can't
Thing of it is, I'm sure you won't need much
2
Remember that, Mean Man. Because there will be others who come along, say they want to help, say they want the same thing
When they tell you that, they're telling you a lie, but not because they want to. It's because they don't know
See, there are *others*, Mean Man

I'm just the one that got away
Coming behind!
But you never really get away, do you?
Do him!
So when my brothers come to get me, I'm counting on you to make it right
And I'm sorry, I should just say that now
Get some get some.
I'm sorry to put this on you
Go go GO!

You didn't ask for my burdens
Hell, you've already got burdens of your own.
You don't need mine
But what else was I supposed to do, huh?
Nobody ever believed me when I told them the truth
What *else* was I supposed to *do*?
I *tried* and *tried*.
They didn't *listen*.
They didn't *care*.

Everyone always wants proof.
When it comes to it, though, the only proof they'll take is my body in a bag
And then it's too late isn't it?
That's the way it goes. Just another runaway murdered, that's all they'll see
POLICE LINE
They'll blame it on drugs, or sex, or both, or maybe neither.
They'll make what happened to me mundane, Mean Man.
They'll make it forgettable.
POE


That's what scares me the most
Even if you do nothing more, please, do this for me
My name is Lucy Braddock
Don't forget me
TO BE CONTINUED...
Like it? Pick up your copy of Wolverine #1 on MAY 21!

# SPIDER-SENSE, TELEVISED!

## Spider-Man animated series swings to MTV this summer

Spider-Man's finally back on the screen...albeit smaller and more animated than the last time we saw him.

Fresh off the blockbuster success of last summer's film, an all-new animated series, simply titled "Spider-Man," is set to debut this summer on MTV from Marvel Studios and CTDT Family Entertainment. For the cutting-edge network, the decision to bring Spidey aboard was a no-brainer.

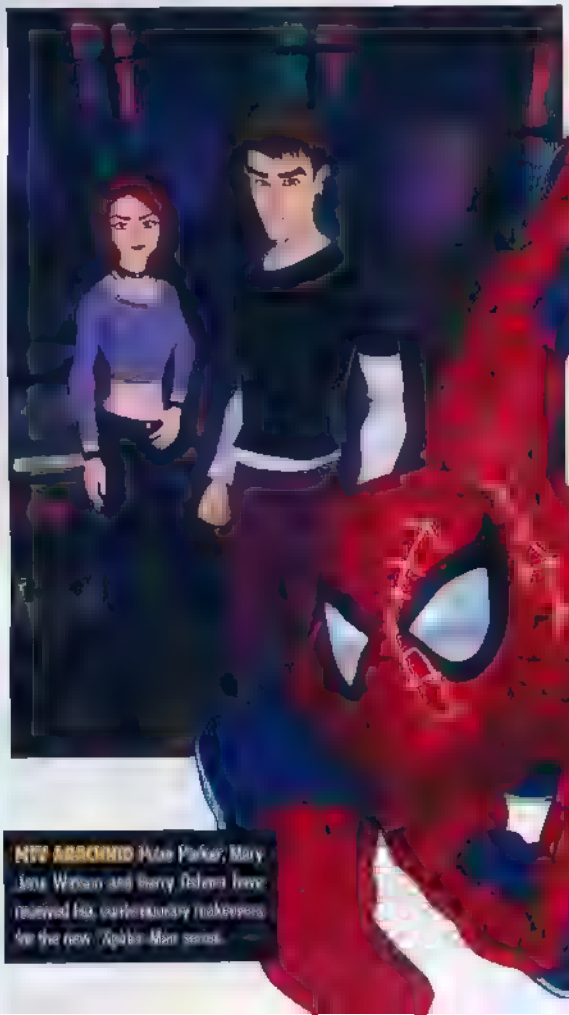
"We thought we could do a really great animated drama," said MTV Executive Marian Davis. "Since 'Aeon Flux,' we haven't really done a cool, dramatic series, and I think 'Spider-Man' will be one of those series with great action, but also more in terms of personal stories."

The series follows movie continuity, picking up right where Sam Raimi's opus left off

"The spirit of the series is picked straight out of the movie," said executive producer Morgan Gendel, who also serves as the show's main writer. "The combination of humor and seriousness, Peter's romantic dilemmas and the dichotomy of being both Peter Parker and Spider-Man—we're going to explore those very same themes." Fans will recognize the setting and the main characters—Peter, Mary Jane Watson and Harry Osborn during their college years in New York. But don't expect to hear the familiar voices of Tobey Maguire, Kirsten Dunst and James Franco. "Spider-Man" ushers in a brand-new cast of actors to bring the characters to life—and you just might recognize their voices! Neil Patrick Harris (of "Doogie Howser, M.D." fame) tackles the lead role of Peter Parker/Spider-Man, singer/songwriter Lisa Loeb gives voice to MJ, and Ian Ziering ("Beverly Hills 90210") handles the voice of Harry.

Expect the tone of the series to be edgier than any animated incarnation of Spidey that's gone before—and a good deal funnier, too. "We do a fair amount of the classic wisecracking, without overdoing it," said Gendel. "But I'd say the humor comes more from the predicaments of the relationships." The edgier feel takes advantage of the maturity of MTV's audience, making it clear that the show is not aimed at the Saturday morning crowd.

"That's been our mantra," agreed Gendel. "If I see something in the storyboards that I think could be Saturday morning,



**MTV ABSORBED** Peter Parker, Mary Jane Watson and Harry Osborn have received the contemporary makeovers for the new "Spider-Man" series.

# toons

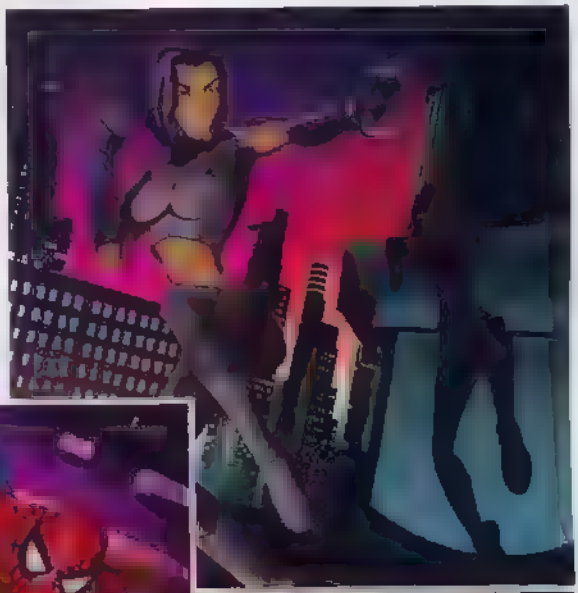
I say, 'This is Saturday morning, let's upgrade it.' Again, some of the relationship stuff is definitely more 'Dawson's Creek' than Saturday morning."

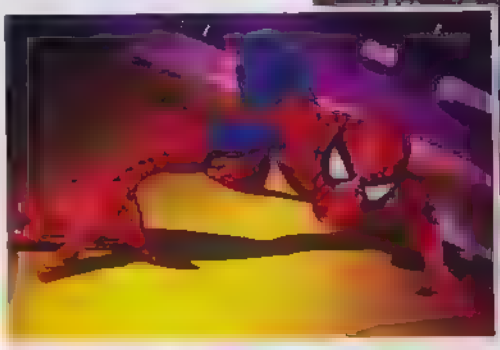
When it comes to villains, the series will boast a mix of old and new. "We certainly use our share of classic Spider-Man villains, like Electro, Kraven the Hunter and the Lizard," said Gendel. "But we also created some really cool new characters, which made it kind of fresh Characters like Pterodax, Shikata, a character called Turbojet and tons more."

Sound cool so far? Well, get ready for more excitement, because it's the animation that's gonna make "Spider-Man" truly groundbreaking. The show's animators start off with cutting-edge CGI rendering to draw the edges of the characters and create realistic lighting—then, they compress it down to a more traditional 2D animated feel. "It's very sculptural," said co-executive producer Audu Paden, who oversees the production side of the series. "The shadow lines are very crisp, and you don't see the sort of deep shading that would make it look more 3D. For many of our viewers, it'll be indistinguishable from feature-quality animation."

Bottom line? The level of quality and innovation that "Spider-Man" achieves is mind-blowing—even for the producers of the series.

"I've seen nothing out there right now that compares to what we're doing," said Paden. "And I've been looking! We're absolutely going to amaze and please our audience." ■ RICHARD HO





**SAME THREADS, NEW THREATS** While Spidey's classic costume won't be tweaked, new villains like Talon (above) will cross paths with the wall-crawler.

LIGHTS, CAMERA...

# TRAILERS...

**BADROCK** The hulking teenager from Rob Liefeld's *Youngblood* comic is rumored to be in development as an animated series for the ABC Family Channel.

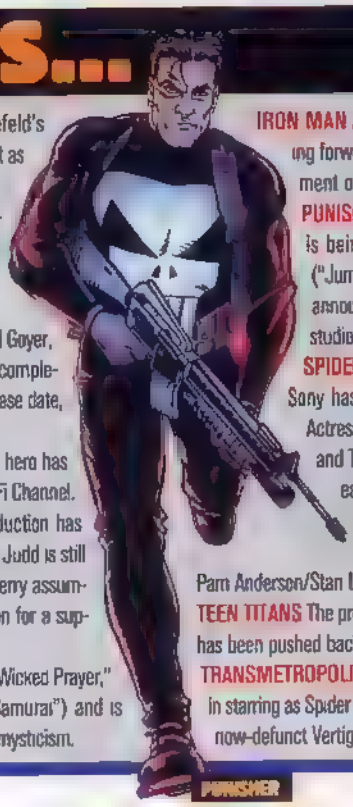
**BATMAN 5** Reportedly a script has been submitted to Warner Bros. titled "Batman: The Frightening," supposedly a darker film with villain Scarecrow and a focus on Batman as a detective.

**BLADE 3** According to returning screenwriter David Goyer, the script for the Daywalker's third film is near completion. New Line has penciled in an August 2004 release date, with Goyer possibly directing as well.

**BROTHER VOODOO** Marvel's 1970s supernatural hero has a pilot script currently in development for the Sci-Fi Channel.

**CATWOMAN** The oft-delayed Warner Bros. production has French director Pitof in the litterbox. While Ashley Judd is still rumored to desire the lead, there's talk of Halle Berry assuming the role! Owen Wilson ("I Spy") has signed on for a supporting role with shooting set to begin in the fall.

**THE CROW 4** The fourth installment, titled "Crow: Wicked Prayer," will be helmed by Lance Mungia ("Six String Samurai") and is rumored to be heavily based in Native American mysticism.



**IRON MAN** According to published reports, New Line is moving forward with its Iron Man film, even without the involvement of "Buffy" creator Joss Whedon.

**PUNISHER** With an estimated budget of $30 million, the film is being written and directed by Jonathan Hensleigh ("Jumanji"). Actor Thomas Jane ("Deep Blue Sea") recently announced that he's been offered the title role, though the studio hasn't confirmed.

**SPIDER-MAN 2** According to screenwriter Michael Chabon, Sony has passed his script to script doctor Alvin Sargent. Actress Elizabeth Banks will reprise her role as Betty Brant, and Tobey Maguire is due to start filming in late March or early April after bulking back up.

**STRIPPERELLA** Kid Rock and directors the Farrelly Brothers have signed on to do guest voices on the Pam Anderson/Stan Lee TNN animated series, debuting this summer.

**TEEN TITANS** The premiere date for the Cartoon Network animated series has been pushed back from May to August.

**TRANSMETROPOLITAN** Patrick Stewart has publicly expressed interest in starring as Spider Jerusalem in a big-screen adaptation of Warren Ellis' now-defunct Vertigo series. ■ THE WIZARD STAFF

PUNISHER

# video game STUFF

## APOCALYPSE NOW!

### 3DO's first mature game brings comics and films onto interactive turf

Welcome to hell—literally. Because when you power on your next-gen console this fall, the Armageddon will be interactive

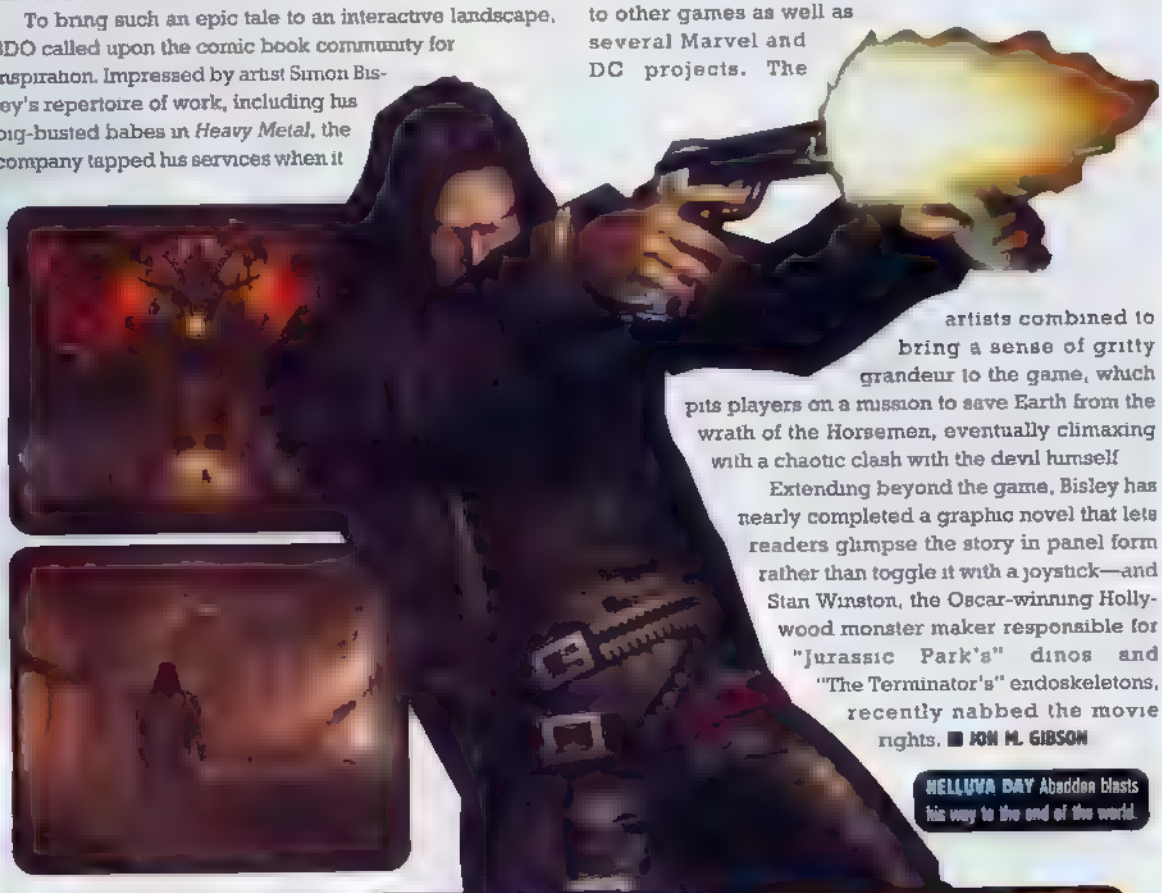
With *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, the 3DO Company, better known for its family-friendly *Army Men* titles, is turning its reputation inside out—with nasty bits of hanging flesh, exposed internal organs and bloodied, drippy limbs for good measure. The game borrows heavily from the Book of Revelations, that oh so holy chapter of the Bible that tells of the end of the world

To bring such an epic tale to an interactive landscape, 3DO called upon the comic book community for inspiration. Impressed by artist Simon Bisley's repertoire of work, including his big-busted babes in *Heavy Metal*, the company tapped his services when it was unable to perfect the game's in-house character designs.

"This is a game full of dark and foreboding characters, situations, and environments—and Simon is a master of that," boasted Producer Kelly Turner. "His sense of design and use of color and lighting are all perfect for this type of content. On top of that, he's an excellent character designer."

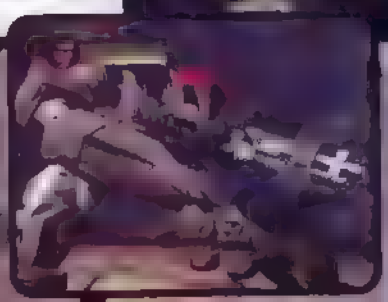
To further develop the lead characters—mainly Abaddon, the hero, and the four harbingers of the apocalypse, War, Famine, Pestilence and Death—3DO also turned to painter Dave DeVries, a long-time contributor to other games as well as several Marvel and DC projects. The artists combined to bring a sense of gritty grandeur to the game, which pits players on a mission to save Earth from the wrath of the Horsemen, eventually climaxing with a chaotic clash with the devil himself

Extending beyond the game, Bisley has nearly completed a graphic novel that lets readers glimpse the story in panel form rather than toggle it with a joystick—and Stan Winston, the Oscar-winning Hollywood monster maker responsible for "Jurassic Park's" dinos and "The Terminator's" endoskeletons, recently nabbed the movie rights. ■ JON M. GIBSON



**MELLUVA DAY** Abaddon blasts his way to the end of the world.

**SNEAK PEEK** Wolverine goes solo in Activision's *Wolverine's Revenge* for PS2, Xbox, GameCube and Game Boy Advance. As you anxiously wait for the film to hit theaters May 2, satisfy your need for all things X with a sneak peek at these exclusive screenshots!



# A VIEWTIFUL SIGHT

## Capcom's 'Viewtiful Joe' forces gamers to see action from a whole new angle

Superheroes have always been more about substance than style, but Capcom's giving gamers a chance to break that mold with the spring release of *Viewtiful Joe* for the GameCube.

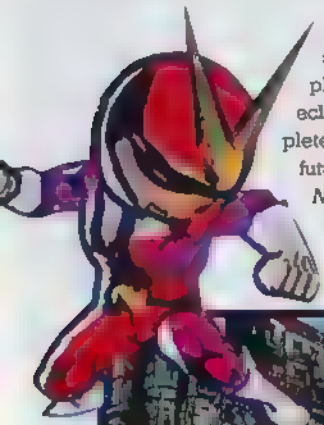
The side-scrolling 2-D adventure mixes platform elements with beat-'em-up action, and offers a unique take on the genre. *Viewtiful Joe* introduces gamers to the world of Joe, an ordinary guy who has some extraordinary abilities. A short, red character with a giant V on his forehead, Joe controls his environment with the panache of a Hollywood director. During fight scenes Joe can go slow-motion (a la "The Matrix") or use his "mach speed" skills to unleash a fury of punches.

The idea, reflected in the game's odd-sounding title, is to create exciting, spectacular views of the action.

"A superhero must not only be brave and strong, but he must also fight his foe with beautiful style," explained Hideki Kamiya, one of the game's producers (and also responsible for Capcom's acclaimed *Devil May Cry*). Joe's quest, which spans an urban, near-gothic landscape, is two-fold---save his girlfriend, and save the world.

*Viewtiful Joe*'s visual style borrows heavily from the comic book genre. Dynamic, highly detailed character designs, fast-paced action with an emphasis on "scenes," and the use of cel-shading (dark, outlined characters and objects) give *Viewtiful Joe* a distinctly stylized, comic-esque look.

The game's spring release marks the debut of Capcom's Fantastic Five, five entirely new titles exclusive to the GameCube platform. The five titles are an eclectic mix, ranging from the completely retooled *Resident Evil 4* to the futuristic shooting action of *Product Number 03, Dead Phoenix* (another fast-paced shooter) and the grim, cel-shaded *Killer 7* round out the group. ■ DAN LEAHY



GO, JOE, GO! Our Viewtiful hero enjoys the view.

# videorumblings

BITS AND BYTES

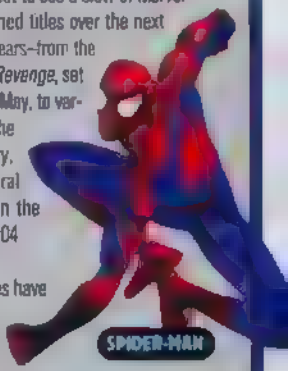
**LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!** Looks like more films based on popular video games are on the horizon. The rights to Infogrames' horror-adventure franchise *Alone in the Dark*, Nintendo's smash-hit franchise *Metroid*, and Capcom's samurai game *Onimusha*, have each been picked up in separate development deals, while rumored scripts for the big screen adaptation of Squaresoft's *Parasite Eve* (the rights are held by Madonna) continue to float around the Internet.

**GAME ON** Brighter, sleeker and as portable as ever! Nintendo's new Game Boy Advance SP updates the old GBA design with a revolutionary front light screen (for illumination in any lighting condition) and a slick new flip-screen. The new design will be compatible with all previous GBA games--however, Nintendo has no plans to discontinue the original GBA model. Look for the SP to hit shelves in North America in March.

GAMEBOY ADVANCE SP

IRON MAN

**MARVEL-OUS DEAL** Why mess with a good thing? Activision and Marvel have agreed to expand their alliance through 2009, an agreement that includes licensing rights for video games for all platforms based on the *Spider-Man*, *X-Men*, *Fantastic Four* and *Iron Man* properties. As a result, expect to see a slew of Marvel-themed titles over the next six years--from the currently in-production *X2: Wolverine's Revenge*, set to debut along with the "X-Men 2" film in May, to various multi-platform releases based on the *Fantastic Four* and *Iron Man*. Additionally, Activision will continue to develop several new *Spider-Man* games to capitalize on the character's film success in 2003 and 2004.



SPIDER-MAN

**GAME AWARDS** It's official. Video games have gone Hollywood. TNN is rolling out the red carpet and developing the first-ever televised awards show for the video game industry. Though specifics--including a venue--have yet to be confirmed, the two-hour award show is tentatively slated for late 2003. Categories like "Hottest Hero and Heroine," "Most Addictive" and "Game of the Year" will honor the best and the brightest of the industry. Our suggestion for the award statue? A big ol' gamer's thumb.

■ THE WIZARD STAFF

# manga MANIA!

COOL JAPANESE COMIC AND ANIMATION NEWS YOU NEED TO KNOW...

# TRIGUN TV

## Sharp-shooting hero comes to Cartoon Network's Adult Swim in March

What do you get when you combine guns, the goofiest hero since the Tick, two overworked insurance investigators, ruthless villains, a minister that carries more weaponry than your average street gang and more guns?

These ingredients make up the insanely popular anime series "Trigun," coming to Cartoon Network's Adult Swim lineup—Monday through Thursday from 11 p.m. to 2 a.m. in March (debut date and air time still to be determined). Licensed for American release by Pioneer Entertainment, "Trigun" combines fast-paced action, gut-splitting humor and a riveting plot to create a truly fantastic series.

The "hero" of "Trigun" is Vash the Stampede, believed to be responsible for the annihilation of the city of July in a post-apocalyptic Western frontier world. Now he has a $60 billion bounty on his head. But Vash ain't your typical anti-hero—his marksmanship is so phenomenal that he never kills his opponents. Plus, Vash is such a goofy and friendly guy that bounty hunters have trouble believing he's actually the infamous Vash the Stampede.

But other pursuers aren't as easy to shake. Meryl Stryfe and Milly Thompson, two investigators from the Bernadelli Insurance Agency, are assigned to track down Vash and prevent him from destroying any more towns (although he goes out of his way to avoid killing, Vash has an incredible talent for random property destruction). Far from stopping Vash, Meryl and Milly usually get sucked into the center of whatever maelstrom he stirs up. The three are soon joined by Nicholas Wolfwood, a traveling minister carrying enough artillery to outfit a small mercenary troop.

The series, while never completely losing its humor, soon takes on a darker tone as Wolfwood, Stryfe and Thompson are drawn into Vash's mission to stop the ruthless murderer Knives and his gang, the Gung-Ho-Guns. But the secrets of Vash's mysterious past may prove to be their undoing.

An anime series so heavy on gunplay may have trouble on American airwaves—even on Cartoon Network's late-night block for adult viewers—but fans need not worry about overdone editing.

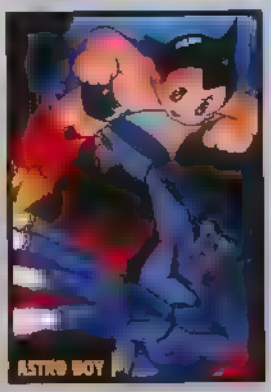
"When the tapes arrive to our library," explained Terry Kalaqian, vice president of programming at Cartoon Network, "we will review [the show] and make the necessary adjustments so that it fits our standards for broadcast and is given the appropriate rating. But fans can be assured that we will be careful to preserve the elements of the story that have made it such a popular series."

■ CAITLIN MOORHEAD

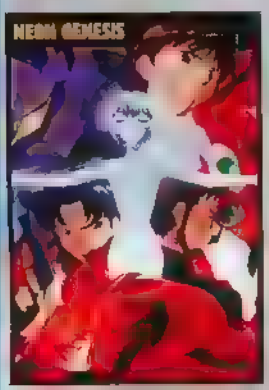
**MARKSMEN** Wolfwood guns for the mysterious Vash the Stampede.

# ANIME BUZZBOX

**BOY TURNS 40!** On Jan. 1, Osamu Tezuka's iconic *Astro Boy* celebrated the 40th anniversary of the original TV series broadcast with the premiere of a brand-new television series in Japan. The series, called "Astro Boy Tetsuwan Atom Premium Version," is the third Astro Boy TV series to hit the airwaves. Following the debut episode, which aired on Animax with English dialogue and Japanese subtitles, the regular broadcast is set to launch on Fuji TV on April 7—Astro Boy's birthday. The series is also scheduled for American broadcast later in the year.

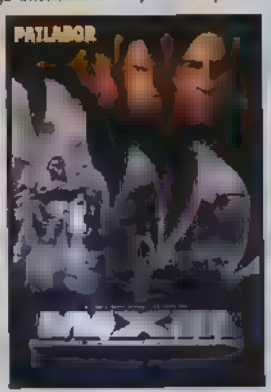



**ALIVE AND WELL.** Gainax Studios is gearing up for a huge Neon Genesis Evangelion revival in Japan. Throughout the first half of 2003, the studio is releasing a wave of brand-new merchandise as part of its "Renewal of Evangelion" project, including a new Japanese DVD release of the television series, complete with re-mastered video and Dolby 5.1 audio. Fans in Japan can look for the first two DVDs, along with an exclusive art-box for the entire series, in June. Other products include a new series of Super-Deformed UFO Catcher Dolls, a new series of action figures in March, a new CD in March featuring remixed versions of the "Zankoku na Tenshi no Thesis" opening and "Fly Me to the Moon" closing themes, and two versions of the sequel to the *Kotetsu no Girlfriend* (*Girlfriend of Steel*) game for PC in April.




**LABOR DAY.** Sharp-eyed Patlabor fans got a treat in January, when Pioneer Entertainment snuck a subtitled print of "Patlabor WXIII," the third *Patlabor* motion picture, into select theaters in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco and Minneapolis. If you missed it, don't worry—a Special Collector's Edition three-disc DVD featuring a bonus disc of the theatrical Mini-Pat shorts and a third disc of supplemental material (including a making-of documentary, trailers and more) will be available on April 8.

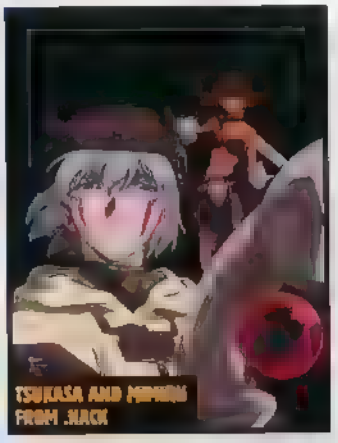
**WATCH—OR DIE!** The rumor mill churns on! According to initial reports from January's Ohaycon convention, Manga Entertainment's planned April 15 release of the three-part OVA series "Read Or Die" would edit the three parts together into one movie-length feature. Although the single-feature format would be convenient for fans, the editing would remove the ultra-cool multiple openings and endings. One week later, Manga Entertainment spokesman Keith Burgess officially refuted the rumor and assured fans that "R.O.D." will be released in America unedited, with a standard DVD "play all" function and credits intact. ■ **THE WIZARD STAFF**




# HACK ATTACKS

## Multimedia '.hack' hacks into America

Prepare to get hacked! Bandai's sprawling ".hack" property debuted in the U.S. in February with the launch of the first anime series on Cartoon Network, called ".hack://SIGN." Spanning four different media types, including television animation, original video animation, video games and comic books, ".hack" has gained massive popularity in Japan and is poised to take American audiences by storm as well.



TSUKASA AND MIMIURU FROM .HACK

".hack://SIGN" takes place in the near future, after a global network meltdown causes the entire Internet to crash. A new online roleplaying game, called *The World*, is launched by a mysterious company shortly after the network is resurrected and quickly becomes the top-selling video game of all time. As *The World* reaches 20 million users, Tsukasa, a new player, enters the online world. But something's wrong—Tsukasa can't log out, and everything in the world reacts to his senses as though he were actually there! To top it all off, there's a strange beast that seems to be protecting him, killing characters in *The World* and sending their players in the real world into comas!

This first series follows the antisocial Tsukasa's strange and somber journey to the center of *The World*, as he struggles to uncover the secrets behind his strange powers and what evil lies behind the game.

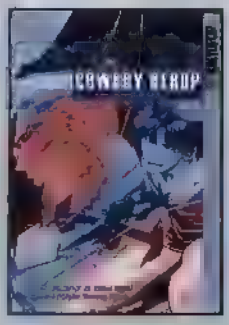
The plot continues through a series of four PlayStation 2 video games, the first volume of which was released in February along with ".hack://SIGN." The events in the game take place six months after the events in ".hack://SIGN." Subsequent volumes will each be released with an OVA episode titled ".hack://LIMINALITY," which essentially tells what happens in the real world during the game. Then, look for the release of a new anime series called ".hack: The Legend of Twilight Bracelet," which takes place five years after the games.

All of these follow chronologically, so you'll have to watch everything to know all there is to know about *The World*. Fortunately, it's such a deep and fascinating story that you'll always be hungry for more. ■ **ZAC BERTSCHY**

# HOT IMPORTS

## MANGA

**COUNTER-OPS #1 (Antarctic Press)** From Peter Ang and Jin Sang Kim comes a new series about a highly trained Canadian counter-terrorist unit that must thwart a deadly threat to their neighbors to the south—the U.S.! $3.95




**COWBOY BEBOP: SHOOTING STAR VOL. 1 (TOKYOPOP)** Think Marvel's classic series *What If...?* for manga fans. The popular bounty hunters are back, but this time, things are a little different in this retelling of the classic story. $9.99

**METROPOLIS TP (Dark Horse)** First printed over 50 years ago, this important work by *Astro Boy* creator Osamu Tezuka, considered by many to be the pioneer of manga, tells the story of a little robot girl in search of parents who do not exist. $13.95

**SAMURAI LEGEND GN (Central Park Media)** The legendary samurai Jubei sets out to retrieve a stolen book he has pledged to protect. But can he do it before Japan descends into a bloody civil war? $15.95

## ANIME

**ANDROID KIKAIDER: THE ANIMATION (Bandai)** A humanoid robot charged with the task of protecting the children of his creator from an evil scientist is put to the test. DVD–$29.98

**GALL FORCE DVD COLLECTION (Central Park Media)** Four DVDs collect the "Gall Force" saga, which chronicles the adventures of a spaceship crew during a war against a bio-technical civilization. DVD Set–$74.99

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**TENCHI MUYO VOLS. 1-4 (Pioneer)** As part of Pioneer's 10th Anniversary celebration, the original *Tenchi Muyo* OVA series is now collected on four DVDs, each packaged with a collectible coin. DVDs–29.98 each

## STUFF

**MAX STERLING'S VF-1J (Toynami)** From the Robotech Masterpiece Collection Vol. 4! This blue-and-white Veritech fully transforms from Battloid to Guardian to Fighter and features real rubber tires, opening cockpit and functioning LED light. (April) $79.99

**SHINOBU MAEHARA BATH TOWEL STATUE (Tokyo Mint)** From the popular manga *Love Hina*! Standing 7 inches tall, this hand-painted, cold-resin statue (left) features Shinobu in an "oopsie" pose looking back at the viewer! (May) $99.99

COMMENTS? QUESTIONS? STORY IDEAS? DROP US A LINE AT:
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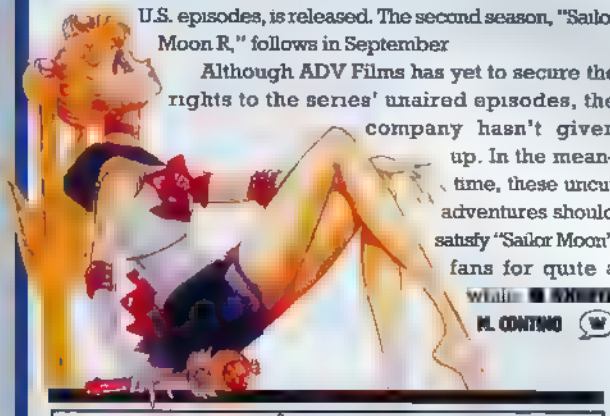
# FULL SAILOR MOON

*Sailor Moon* fans rejoice—ADV Films is finally releasing the first season of the mega-popular series in its original, uncut form!

DIC Entertainment, the company responsible for the U.S. television distribution of "Sailor Moon" over the years, had eliminated a lot of the mature content, questionable situations and violence that was present in the originals, as well as choosing not to air several episodes. And when ADV Films released the first season of the series on DVD in 2001—with none of the "original, uncut" footage—fans were disappointed again.

Still, diehard fans kept hoping that ADV Films would eventually get the rights to present these episodes uncut—and their patience will be rewarded this July, when a DVD box set of "Sailor Moon," containing the uncut versions of the subtitled U.S. episodes, is released. The second season, "Sailor Moon R," follows in September.



Although ADV Films has yet to secure the rights to the series' unaired episodes, the company hasn't given up. In the meantime, these uncut adventures should satisfy "Sailor Moon" fans for quite a while.

M. CONTINO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# BOOK of the MONTH!

# HARLEY QUINN

## NO LONGER SECOND FIDDLE TO 'MISTAH J,' THE CLOWN PRINCESS OF CRIME GOES FROM LAUGHABLE TO LETHAL WITH A NEW DIRECTION

**Harley Quinn has finally stepped out** of the Joker's shadow...it's just too bad she won't get the chance to enjoy it.

Kiss the days of sucking up to "Mistah J" and playing the role of eye candy in Batman's Rogues Gallery goodbye. New series writer (and comics newcomer) A.J. Lieberman has transformed Harley Quinn into a realistic female character who just so happens to be a no-nonsense badass. However, the supervillain still looks super-sexy, thanks to the deft pencils of indy veteran Mike Huddleston (Oni Press' *The Coffin*). In fact, the creative duo plan on taking Harley one step further by not only treating her as a rogue to be reckoned with, but also making her a symbol for women's liberation.

"We're re-establishing Harley as a modern, independent woman," explains Lieberman. "We're trying to give her a different backbone and make her stand up to the Joker as opposed to being his mat. She's going to be a little more emboldened, more of an empowered woman."

Since Lieberman and Huddleston took over *Harley Quinn* with November's issue #26, both the character and story have undergone a complete 180 from her previous status quo. Lieberman's transformed the character from comic relief into grizzled antihero with a sick wit.

"I'm just trying to make her a stronger character, a little more dangerous and a little more schizophrenic," says Lieberman. "A character where a reader will think they know what she'll do next, but it's up to us to fool them and give them something else."

In "Vengeance Unlimited" (the current storyarc), Lieberman and Huddleston throw Harley into a situation where the stakes—and the body count—are high. Framed for killing a Gotham City undercover cop named James Seaborn, the fun-loving *femme fatale* finds herself on the run from a detective known only as Bishop, Seaborn's former partner, who won't rest until Harley's six feet under. However, thanks to GCPD department regulations that require Bishop to attend psychiatric counseling, the hardnose soon spills his guts to Harley's new alter ego, Dr. Jessica Seaborn (who's no relation to James; the name is Harley's idea of a cruel joke), for $80 an hour.

In addition to being hunted by a loose-cannon detective, Harley's been forced to avoid an assortment of soldiers-for-hire, obsessed lunatics (most of whom are her new patients) and, thanks to nearly killing him via an open elevator shaft, the Joker, all while relentlessly tracking the fiend who's framed her.

Despite *Harley's* new direction, Lieberman's kept her trademark twisted sense of humor intact. For example, when Harley finds herself on the business end of a machine gun pointed from a police chopper and told to get on her knees, she coolly replies, "Maybe when we get to know each other better." Even with the laughs, Lieberman and Huddleston have cranked up the

**SHOOTING GALLERY** The duck is Harley's first prize; the Joker's head is the second.

MAYBE I CAN RETURN THE FAVOR
HOW'S THAT?
WELL, WELL, WELL. WORD HAS IT YOU'RE IN A LITTLE BIT OF A JAM
WHY, ARE YOU OFFERING TO HELP?
I'M ALWAYS HERE FOR YOU HARLEY, YOU KNOW THAT
WELL, FOR ONE, I'D HOLD ON TIGHT
HOLD ON TO WHAT?
POW
CHANK

**LOVE GETS THE BIRD?** Trying to kill Mistah J by blowing open an elevator shaft? Harley's her own clown, now. (We never understood the attraction, anyway...)

action to 11, mixing elements of John Woo flicks with homages to "Charlie's Angels" and "The Long Kiss Goodnight."

Huddleston's pencils serve as the perfect compliment to Lieberman's revamp of the series. Known throughout the small press for his dark and foreboding style, Huddleston nails the backdrop of Gotham City, but on the flipside, Harley has never looked more adorable, appearing less supermodel and more wholesome-but-hot girl next door.

"My concept on Harley was to keep her cute and bring her look back a little closer to the animated series, but then depict the world around her as very dark and serious," reveals Huddleston. "All this is taking place in Gotham City, so it should be pretty dark."

After what's sure to be a shocking and violent conclusion to "Vengeance Unlimited" in March's issue #30, Harley will take care of some unfinished business with her former beau, the Joker, in issue #31. Lieberman and Huddleston kick off another five-part storyarc in June's *Harley Quinn* #33. If being on the run from a host of money-hungry lunatics wasn't bad enough, she's definitely in store for some headaches come summertime.

"In the second arc, we'll see a part of her that no one's ever seen," hints Lieberman. "A child comes into play that Harley has to deal with and almost become a mother to, but she's obviously a sick mother."

Sick mother or not, judging by the series' new direction, this is one Harley that guarantees a wild ride! ■ **CASEY SELWAS**

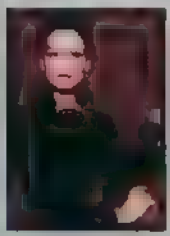
MORE CRAZY-HOT CHICK CRAZINESS

# bookmarks

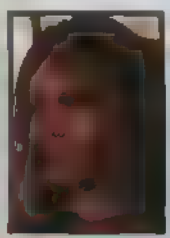
## CRAZY/BEAUTIFUL

**There's nothing like a crazy-yet-hot chick to get our blood boiling, which is why we've fallen head-over-heels for the new Harley Quinn. Here are some other girls gone wild that make our libido do the locomotion.**

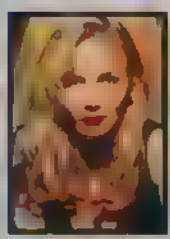
**DREW BARRYMORE IN 'MAD LOVE'** Following a suicide attempt, cutie-pie/nutjob Casey Roberts (Barrymore) is hospitalized and her witless boyfriend helps her escape. Heading toward Mexico, we're treated to a loopy Drew Barrymore in a tank top AND a convertible! Hot!



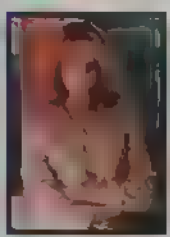
**FAMKE JANSSEN IN 'GOLDENEYE'** Before she left fanboys quivering in their prescription pants with her role as Jean Grey in "X-Men," the lovely Ms. Janssen broke hearts (and crushed lungs) as the leggy-but-lethal Bond villainess Xenia Onatopp. Call US crazy, but one night with Xeny is worth the pain!



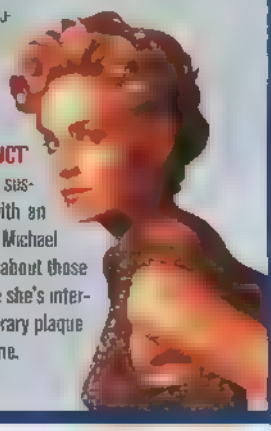
**ANGELINA JOLIE IN 'GIRL, INTERRUPTED'** Who wouldn't wanna make out with seductive sociopath Lisa Rowe (played by real-life crazy woman, Angelina Jolie)? She's great at escaping, so even when she's locked up in the mental institution, she'll still make time for ya!



**REBECCA DEMORNAY IN 'THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE'** If Peyton Flanders (DeMornay) were our mom, we'd still be breastfeeding! Okay, she tries to steal her employer's husband and torments them mentally challenged handyman—but she's got a killer motherly instinct, so she could raise our love child any day of the week and twice on Sunday!



**NICOLE KIDMAN IN 'TO DIE FOR'** The hard-chargin', independent type with a body to kill for is just our type, and nubile newscaster Suzanne Stone Maretto (Kidman) fits those attributes nicely. We really admire the fact that she'll let nothing stand in her way—even if it means manipulating three high school kids into killing her rivals. Now *that* is hot.



**SHARON STONE IN 'BASIC INSTINCT'** Sure, Catherine Tramell (Stone) is suspected of murdering some dude with an icepick and finds the cop played by Michael Douglas attractive, but who cares about those lapses in sanity? The scene where she's interrogated has earned Stone an honorary plaque in the Crazy Hot Chick Hall of Fame.

■ **THE WIZARD STAFF**

# SECRET STASH

comics' hidden gems

# PRIVATE BEACH

## 'TWIN PEAKS' MEETS 'MUST-SEE TV' IN THIS SERIES ABOUT A 20-SOMETHING WHO'S A LIGHTNING ROD FOR THE BIZARRE

**THE DIRT** Trudy Honeyvan lives a seemingly normal life—work, hanging out with friends, etc. Yet despite her best attempts at staying mundane, she can't help but be a magnet for the bizarre and unexplained. Read all about Trudy's reluctant adventures in Slave Labor Graphics' *Private Beach*, created by David Hahn.

**DOYA LIKE?** If you're a fan of female-driven slice-of-life stories *a la* Terry Moore's *Strangers in Paradise* mixed with a healthy dose of "Twin Peaks"-esque surrealism, then *Private Beach* was made for you.

**DIDJA KNOW?** 2003's shaping up to be a busy year for series creator Hahn. In addition to several upcoming projects, Hahn will pencil a four-issue mini-series from Dark Horse Comics titled *What Chaos Knows*, written by Sam Keith (*Zero Girl*) and hitting stands in September.

**What if cult film director David Lynch wrote comics?**

Chances are they'd be surreal, eerie, include hot chicks and probably share a number of other similarities with David Hahn's *Private Beach*, a bi-annual ongoing series from Slave Labor Graphics. What series creator Hahn describes as "an episode of 'The Mary Tyler Moore Show' if it were made in 2003, directed by David Lynch and put into comic book form," *Private Beach* follows Trudy Honeyvan, an everyday 20-something with a knack for snappy banter who's bombarded by strange events and circumstances on a daily basis.

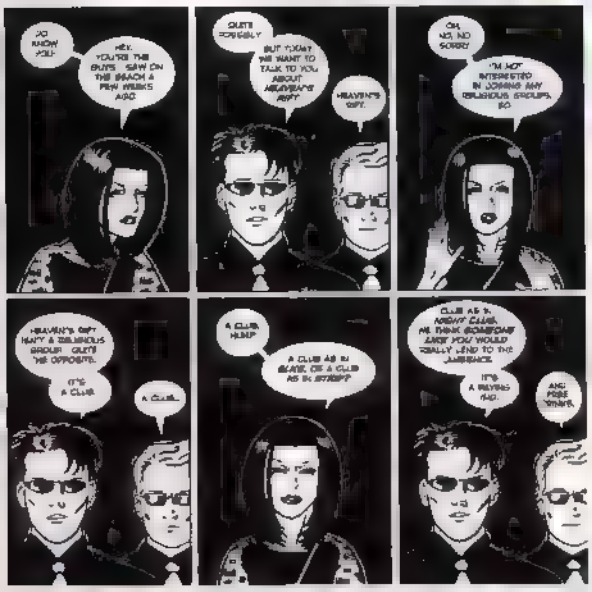
"Trudy has what would appear to be a normal 25-year-old's life: a so-so job and a social life that consists of hanging out in coffee shops with her friends," explains Hahn. "Despite her carefree and winsome countenance, Trudy is slowly becoming aware that her life runs with dark waters."

**DARK ANGEL** While Trudy Honeyvan would love to just watch "The Bionic Woman," dark forces have entered her life.

The first page of issue #1 sets the tone for the series; Hahn tells a story of how God (who takes on the appearance of a 9-year-old boy) one day lined up every human who will ever live in a single-file line, shoulder to shoulder. God then told everyone to walk, and so everyone walked forward (since they had no other direction to go)—save for the two people on either end of the line. On one end was a Japanese farmer who died of strep throat in 1681. On the other end? You guessed it—Trudy Honeyvan.

What follows verifies Hahn's aforementioned "Moore meets Lynch" description perfectly. While Trudy comes across as a semi-cynical and thoroughly independent woman with supermodel looks, she doesn't take crap from condescending comic shop owners and enjoys debating the subtleties of "Planet of the Apes." In short, a fanboy's dream girl.

While Trudy steals the spotlight, the supporting cast are equally well-developed. Trudy's best friends, a set of spunky twins named Sharona and Siobhan, serve as the perfect "Odd Couple"-esque comic relief, while


NO KNOW YOU!
HEY, YOU'RE THE GUYS I SAW ON THE BEACH A FEW WEEKS AGO!
QUITE POSSIBLY.
BUT TODAY WE WANT TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT HEAVEN'S GIFT.
HEAVEN'S GIFT.
OH, NO, NO SORRY.
I'M NOT INTERESTED IN JOINING ANY RELIGIOUS GROUPS, SO.
HEAVEN'S GIFT HAVN'T A RELIGIOUS GROUP! QUITE THE OPPOSITE.
IT'S A CLUB.
A CLUB.
A CLUB, HUH?
A CLUB AS IN BEATS, OR A CLUB AS IN STRIP?
CLUB AS IN ANSWER CLUB. WE THINK SOMEONE LIKE YOU WOULD REALLY FIND TO THE LIKING!
IT'S A PAYING CLUB.
AND FREE DRINKS.

**MYSTERY MEN** After Trudy catches a pair of bizarre men in black staring at her from across the street, they cryptically offer her a job. J and K, they ain't.

the utterly sad and pathetic Sam (a poor schlub who lost his leg in an auto accident and lives off of a healthy settlement—albeit in a house full of mutant cockroaches) gives Trudy an outlet for her compassion. Meanwhile, Hahn's art brings to mind a mixture of manga influences and Los Bros. Hernandez, perfectly suiting the perplexities of Trudy's life.

On top of being followed by a series of shady past acquaintances and men in black, Trudy also keeps receiving strange messages all saying the same thing: "We are watching you." When even her trusty Magic 8 Ball gives her a similar message, Trudy cracks open the toy and is immediately transported to another dimension. She returns only after she unknowingly swallows the little dice-thing floating inside the fortune-telling billiards ball. Weird, huh?

According to Hahn, there's an underlying connection that has slowly revealed itself over the past few issues. Most notably in issue #7, which found Trudy kidnapped by a mysterious group known only as The Network.

"The next storyarc will have some major revelations," hints Hahn. "There is a bigger mechanism that links [all the weirdness] together. The series is entering a major arc that will launch the title in a slightly different direction."

That said, if you're looking for an obscure slice-of-life story, kick off your shoes and head for *Private Beach*. With a healthy dose of the everyday mixed with the extraordinary, this book's a must-read for anyone whose tastes lean toward the peculiar.

**THE LAST WORD** David Hahn flips the concept of slice-of-life with bizarre twists and interesting characters, all while making you think twice about those random events that sometimes occur. Thus *Private Beach* is one locale you can look forward to visiting every month. ■ **CASEY SEMAS**

**WANNA PICK UP THIS SERIES?**

Visit your COMIC-BOOK store or call your favorite comic-shop or visit www.steveisland-graphics.com to order directly. Do you have a comic store that features the "Secret Stash" treatment? We're looking for "Secret Stash"-style Island Entertainment, 451 Wells Ave. Congers, NY, 10920 or e-mail us at steve@steveislandcomics.com

# HIDE 'N' SEEK

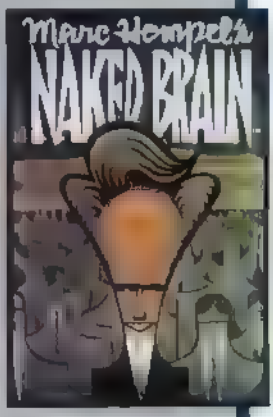
TRACK THESE BABIES DOWN

**Does *Private Beach* sound like a winner? Then why not check out these books as well? All items ship in March unless otherwise noted.**

**SPROCKET MAN** There have been some hilarious–albeit unlikely–duos throughout the history of comedy. For example, Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin, Andy Kauffman and Jerry "The King" Lawler, and Jackie Chan and a ladder, just to name a few.

Now, Kerry Callen takes the formula one step further with his ongoing series *Halo and Sprocket* (Amaze Ink), which follows the day-to-day life of a brunette named Katie who lives with an over-analytical yet completely naive robot named Sprocket and a disassociated and pessimistic angel named Halo. Throughout the series, Halo and Sprocket try and learn how to be human by watching Katie, but in turn become even more confused about the everyday lives of the human race. The stories are both insightful and hilarious as Callen's mixture of deadpan and slapstick humor prove that an emotionless robot and a headstrong angel can spark serious laughs. $2.95. Visit **www.amazeink.com** for order info.

**'BRAIN' DRAIN:** Marc Hempel's *Naked Brain* returns this month, offering up more of Hempel's insightful social satire through one-panel strips and crazy characters, such as the eternally naïve Victim Victoria and the testosterone-drenched Tug and Buster. $2.95. **www.insightstudios.com**




**VOYEURS REJOICE!** James Kochalka's back with an all-new third edition of his *Sketchbook Diaries*, giving his fans insight into the indy veteran's daily life seen through his highly personal journal entries. Sometimes silly, sometimes sad, *Diaries* offers an amazing glimpse into the human experience. $7.95. **www.topshelfcomix.com**

**'JOSÉ' CAN YOU SEE** Writer Tootsie Corn Rolls and artist Juan Doe dish out political commentary with twisted, oddball humor in Quality Socku Funnies all-new quarterly series *Bazooka José*, which finds the cast of the classic film "Scarface" tackling current events, making for some profound yet lighthearted situations. $15. **www.sklabs design.com/bazookajoe.html**.

**FIRE ALERT** This past January, Teenagers from Mars penciler Rob G.'s Brooklyn, N.Y., apartment caught fire and destroyed all of his artwork from Mars as well as pages from his upcoming projects Couriers (AiT/PlanetLar), a Batman story and all of his belongings. Fortunately, Rob was unharmed. Donations of money and goods can be sent to: Rick Spears, 609 President St. #2, Brooklyn, NY, 11215. ■ **CS**

# 'NET GAINS

## GIRL POWER SILENCED

### As the 'Supergirl' series winds down, back-issue prices heat up

What happens when a long-standing title featuring one of the most recognizable characters in comics suddenly becomes one of the most sought-after books around?

Answer: The book gets canceled.

DC's "Maid of Might" is now the "Maid of Might-Have-Been" with the company's announcement that *Supergirl* will be canceled with March's issue #80.

Ironically, the announcement arrived just as the title was picking up steam. Peter David, writer for the entire run of the series, began a new story-arc in the ultra-rare issue #75, in which Kara Zor-El, the original Supergirl from the Silver Age, reappeared. Fanboys went nuts, and demand for that issue, as well as #76, has been rapidly increasing. Issues #77 and #78 propelled the title into Diamond's Top 100, landing at slot Nos. 98 and 82, respectively.

"My numbers [for #75 and #76] were at least 25 percent more than usual, and we still sold out," said Alan Giroux, owner of All About Books and Comics in Phoenix, Ariz. "If I had any available, I'd easily be able to sell them for double the cover price."

So what's the story behind the axe? According to David, it's simple economics.

"I didn't deliver the numbers," he said. "The Kara storyline was done specifically to save the book from being canceled. I was hoping for a 25-50 percent increase in sales, but when the numbers for #75 came in, it was only up a disappointing 2,000 copies.

"I immediately knew that was it for the book," David continued. "I wish DC had waited to see the overall sales of the arc before making their decision, but the retailers are the ones who really missed the boat. They didn't get behind it."

According to retailers, there wasn't enough of an incentive to significantly increase *Supergirl*'s orders.

"Peter David has a very loyal following," said Avrom Oliver, owner of Adventures in Comics & Games in Carmichael, Calif., "but the numbers for *Supergirl* used to do well and they definitely tapered off towards the end. It's difficult to increase orders much with that in mind."

So what's next for the Girl of Steel? "My intention is not to leave a dry eye in the house," David said of *Supergirl* #80. He added that he was "as surprised as anyone else" to see a new Supergirl character debut in January's *Superman: The 10-Cent Adventure*. Matt Keller, DC's manager of marketing services, said the company currently has no plans for a new Supergirl project. What does this mean for the heat attached to *Supergirl* back issues?

"If there's no continuity to the character, the back-issue market will die," said Rich Conley, owner of Heroes & Fantasies in Universal City, Texas. "It's a very good story, but now that nothing new will be coming out, the excitement will die."

But there's hope yet for empty-handed fanboys looking to read David's final arc. "Several retailers have suggested a collection of those issues," said Bob Wayne, DC's vice president of sales and marketing, "and we're evaluating it." ■ **JIM AREHART**

**CANCELLATION BLUES** Even with a sales spurt on the last few issues, Supergirl couldn't save the day.

# FREE COMICS MAYDAY!

## Fans and retailers gear up for Free Comic Book Day 2

After paying 30 bucks for popcorn, soda and your "X-Men 2" ticket, why not head to the comic shop for some freebies?

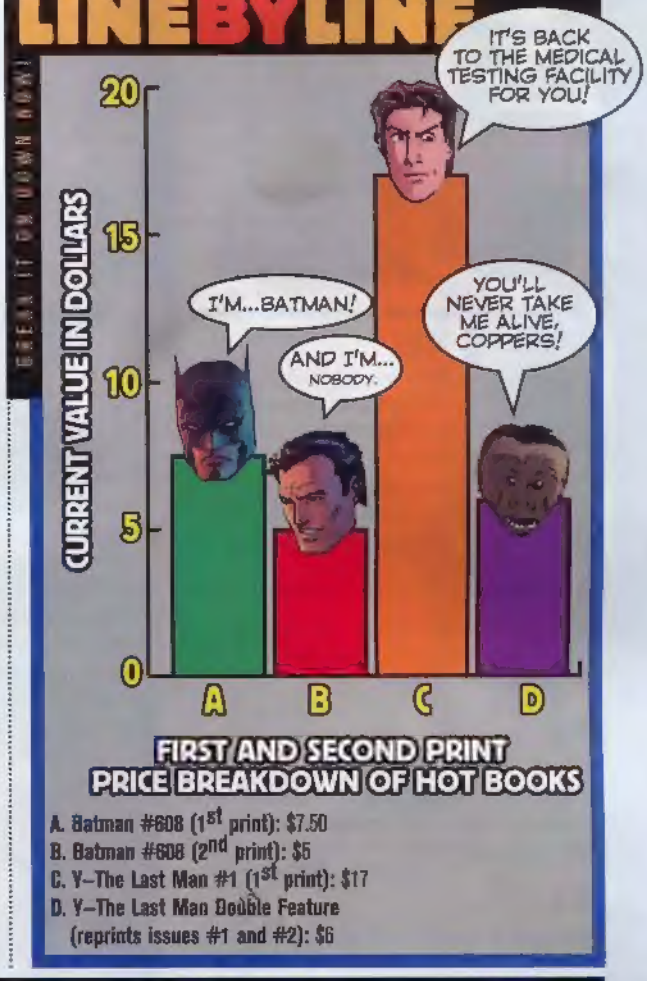
On Saturday, May 3, Free Comic Book Day returns, arriving the day after the premiere of the much-anticipated "X-Men" sequel. Last summer, comic shops around the country gave out over two million comics in the wake of "Spider-Man." This year, with more comic companies offering a wider variety of free material, retailers expect a turnout to rival last year's!

Every participating store will give out FCBD editions of books such as *Ultimate X-Men* #1, *Batman Adventures* #1, *Transformers: Armada* #1 and the *Way of the Rat Movie Special*, among others. Some stores will carry books by Silver and Bronze sponsors. These books are from independent publishers such as Oni Press (*Skinwalker* #1) and Alternative Comics (James Kochalka's *Peanut Butter and Jeremy* #4), but are available in limited quantities, so if you want 'em, let your local store know. (Go to **www.freecomicbookday.com** for a complete list of titles.)

"We might tone it down this year because of the sheer number of publishers involved," said Bill Liebowitz, owner of Los Angeles' Golden Apple Comics. "Last year, we had everything but a human sacrifice. Our focus this year will be reaching out to new customers by giving out flyers at movie theaters."

David Hinson, of Dave's Comics in Fort Mill, S.C., said, "The first Free Comic Day helped sales throughout the whole year. This year, I'm going to run ads in my local paper letting everyone know I'm giving away comic books!" ■ **KARL CRAMER**

# LINEBYLINE

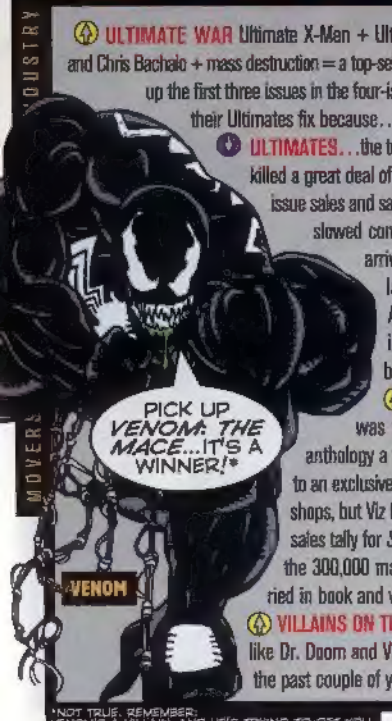



**FIRST AND SECOND PRINT PRICE BREAKDOWN OF HOT BOOKS**

A. Batman #608 (1st print): $7.50
B. Batman #608 (2nd print): $5
C. Y–The Last Man #1 (1st print): $17
D. Y–The Last Man Double Feature (reprints issues #1 and #2): $6

# UPS & DOWNS

INDUSTRY MOVERS




*NOT TRUE. REMEMBER: VENOM'S A VILLAIN, AND HE'S TRYING TO GET YOU TO BUY CRAPPY BACK ISSUES. DON'T FALL FOR IT

**ULTIMATE WAR** Ultimate X-Man + Ultimate Avengers + Mark Millar and Chris Bachalo + mass destruction = a top-selling smash. Readers have picked up the first three issues in the four-issue mini-series in droves to get their Ultimates fix because...

**ULTIMATES...** the terminal lateness of this book has killed a great deal of interest in the title. Both back-issue sales and sales of the trade paperback have slowed considerably, and issue #8 finally arrived in January (three months late). However, the Captain America/Hank Pym showdown in issue #9 should lure readers back to the *Ultimates* pasture.

**SHONEN JUMP** Not only was the first issue of this manga anthology a through-the-roof success (due to an exclusive Yu-Gi-Oh! card insert) in comic shops, but Viz Comics has stated that the total sales tally for *Shonen Jump* #1 hovers around the 300,000 mark due to the book being carried in book and video chains.

**VILLAINS ON THE REBOUND** Badass bad guys like Dr. Doom and Venom have been laying low for the past couple of years but are now on the comeback trail! *Ultimate Spider-Man* #33, the debut of Ultimate Eddie Brock and the new "symbiote," stands as one of the hottest back issues on the market while Vic Von Doom returns in March's *Fantastic Four* #67! Anybody have Lobo's phone number?

**INCREDIBLE HULK BACK ISSUES** While it's no secret that comic-based flicks bolster back-issue sales, *Incredible Hulk* smashes the rest of the Hollywood-bound pack. Issues from the Stan Lee, Peter David and Bruce Jones runs are all hulking out and seeing green on the back market.

**CHEAP COMICS** *Superman: The 10-Cent Adventure* and *Daredevil* #41 (priced at 25 cents) each outsold the competition on this month's Top 50 list, but these books have two strikes against them: one, Diamond no longer ranks bargain-priced comics, and two, according to retailers, neither book reached the levels of *Batman: The 10-Cent Adventure* or *Fantastic Four* #60.

# HOT 10 comics

***Wizard*, by staying in touch with hundreds of retailers throughout the country, keeps a close eye on the hottest back issues. These are the books ringing the registers this month...**

## 1 BATMAN #608 (RETAILER ISSUE)

**WRITER:** Jeph Loeb
**ARTISTS:** Jim Lee & Scott Williams

Wanna know how to make an already-hot comic even hotter? Throw an exclusive, retailers-only meeting like DC recently held and hand out a limited-edition issue of *Batman* #608 sporting a new Jim Lee cover. With only an estimated 200 copies of this bad boy in circulation, demand for the retailer's *Batman* #608 immediately went through the roof, with some folks picking up copies online for as much as a whopping $500! Now that's crazier than the Joker on a tank of nitrous! **LAST MONTH: N.R. (Not Rated)**

## 2 ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN #33

**WRITER:** Brian Michael Bendis
**ARTISTS:** Mark Bagley & Art Thibert

After Venom set up residence in the land of over-exposure in the early '90s only to seemingly disappear completely from Marvel lore shortly thereafter, fans have been anxiously awaiting the triumphant return of Spider-Man's symbiotic, tongue-waggling doppelganger. So naturally, when the revamped Eddie Brock made his Ultimate debut in *Ultimate Spidey* #33, fans went on a buying frenzy. Now, how's about Carnage Redux? No? Fair enough. **LAST MONTH: N.R.**

## 3 Y–THE LAST MAN #1

**WRITER:** Brian K. Vaughan
**ARTISTS:** Pia Guerra & Jose Marzan

Despite the trades and fancy-schmancy double-issue reprints, collector interest in this issue refuses to slow. As buzz continues to build around the adventures of Yorick Brown, retailers have jacked prices of first prints of the series up to $15 a pop in most areas. Only one question remains: What the heck kinda name is Yorick? **LAST MONTH: 2**

## 4 30 DAYS OF NIGHT #1

**WRITER:** Steve Niles
**ARTIST:** Ben Templesmith

After spending the better part of 2002 as the industry's hottest back issue, the indy sensation *30 Days of Night* is finally beginning to show signs of slowing. However, there are still folks out there who're scouring the bins for a copy of their own, despite IDW's recently released trade. So when the heck are we gonna see a "30 Days" movie trailer? **LAST MONTH: 1**

## 5 FABLES #2

**WRITER:** Bill Willingham
**ARTISTS:** Lan Medina & Steve Leialoha

Thanks to the recently released *Fables* trade (collecting issues #1–#4), sluggish back-issue sales of *Fables* #1 have become a reality. However, nowadays folks are hunting down the ever-elusive second issue, which has seen a major surge in collectibility and currently has an asking price of $9. **LAST MONTH: N.R.**

## 6 DAREDEVIL #1 (VOL. 2)

**WRITER:** Kevin Smith
**ARTISTS:** Joe Quesada & Jimmy Palmiotti

Thanks to that little "Daredevil" flick that just hit theaters, *Daredevil* back issues continue to be hot as hell. (Devil...hell...yeah, we know it's a tired play on words.) The latest hot potato? The first of Kevin Smith and Joe Quesada's run on the series, given that several scenes in the movie pay homage to panels from this run. **LAST MONTH: N.R.**

## 7 SUPERGIRL #75

**WRITER:** Peter David
**ARTISTS:** Ed Benes & Alex Lei

It's a sad, sad day when a cute blond superhero sportin' a short little skirt can't make it in this business. Despite the fact DC gave this series the ax, fans just refuse to let it go, scooping up issues of Peter David's first ish of his final storyarc on the series faster than you can say "Helen Slater." If only they'd shown this kind of interest earlier... **LAST MONTH: 6**

## 8 ULTIMATE DAREDEVIL & ELEKTRA #2

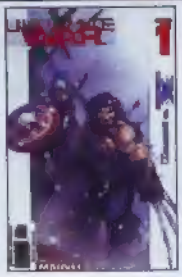
**WRITER:** Greg Rucka
**ARTISTS:** Salvador Larroca & Danny Miki

Sure, the "Daredevil" movie added to the success of this issue, but take a gander at the issue number. It's yet another case of the "Terrible Two's." Low initial retailer orders mixed with the hottest character in comics currently equal you saving up your allowance to pick up this underordered gem. **LAST MONTH: N.R.**

## 9 CAPTAIN MARVEL #1 (ALEX ROSS COVER)

**WRITER:** Peter David
**ARTIST:** ChrisCross

Peter David's fans have spoken as the new direction of *Captain Marvel* blew away the competition in Marvel's U-Decide contest. Toss in a cool, Marvin the Martian-esque cover by superstar artist Alex Ross, and this is a back ish with some serious staying power. **LAST MONTH: N.R.**




## 10 ULTIMATE WAR #1

**WRITER:** Mark Millar
**ARTISTS:** Chris Bachalo & Tim Townsend

It ain't rocket science here–take two hot books, put 'em in one book, slap the word "Ultimate" on the cover and watch the collector frenzy ensue! Not to mention, with (*ahem!*) *Ultimates* shipping later and later, fans need their no-nonsense Avengers fix, and currently there's only one place to get it. **LAST MONTH: 10**

# THE HOTSEAT

## This Month Featuring:

# GEORGE PÉREZ

**Artist of Marvel/DC's upcoming *JLA/Avengers* and CrossGen's *Solus***

**WIZARD:** George, you've had historic runs on *Teen Titans* and *Avengers*. Now you're tackling *JLA/Avengers* and ***Solus*** for CrossGen. How do you get it all done, yo?

**PÉREZ:** Slowly...very slowly.

**WIZARD:** Besides doing awe-inspiring comics, you're also known for your Hawaiian shirts. So that begs the question, how much of your annual income goes to **Hawaiian shirts?**

[*Laughs*] I don't even want to think about it. But actually my wife, Carol Flynn, has been making them for me for a long time now.

**Wearing Hawaiian shirts seems like it would get some attention. When's the last time you were in a fistfight?**

Oh, not since I was in grade school. This kid ripped my Thor comic and then he punched me. I think I ripped his jacket and then he punched me. Then I just ran home.

**That's sad, brother. Did you ever get revenge like Batman would?**

No.

**Well, we know you weren't born to stalk the streets of Gotham protecting the innocent. What else are you not born to do?**

I hate drawing cars, especially moving cars.

**Does that mean we won't see Cap and Superman driving around in a Saab together in *JLA/Avengers*?**

What?

**Uh-huh, that's what I thought. So when was the last time you weren't thinking about *JLA/Avengers*?**

Until you brought it up, at least five minutes.

**Okay, which writers are you dying to work with and what projects do you want to tackle with them?**

Alan Moore and Neil Gaiman spring to mind. And if I ever get to work with them, I'd let them pick the project—anything they want to do.

**Here's the big question. Who plays George Pérez in the George Pérez CBS Movie of the Week?**

Why am I on CBS?

**Just go with it.**

I used to say **Burt Reynolds** and I've heard **Dom DeLuise**, maybe some kind of strange morph of those two?

**Maybe CBS could call it "George Pérez's Cannonball Run."**

Maybe.

**Okay, check out these art legends: Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, Bob Kane and George Pérez.**

Whoa, I've started to hear that "legend" tag more and more, but I'm not even 50 yet. I'm like, "Hey, slow down. I'm too young to be a legend!"

■ **MIKE COTTON**